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Nick Carter Stories

THE GOLDEN HAIR CLEW

-OR-

Nick Carter's Mystic Puzzle

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THE GOLDEN-HAIR CLEW;

Or, NICK CARTER'S MYSTIC PUZZLE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A DISAPPEARING BODY.

"She is a very beautiful woman; I will admit that, Nick, but this is scarcely complimentary to your guests. Besides, I did not know that you were so susceptible to the charms of the fair sex. Come now, pay a little more attention to your own table. You will soon be where you can give all your time to pretty Aztec girls, and you will not see us again for several moons. Make the most of us while you may, old chap."

The stern lines that naturally marked the face of Nick Carter relaxed into a short smile—one of those smiles that his friends were as eager to win as if they had been a woman's. While in repose, the detective's clean-cut features were the very mirror of his soul, but ordinarily he wore a mask of expression that no man might read at will.

"Pardon me, inspector," he said. "I admit that I deserve your rebuke, but I was reading a strange story in the life of the woman to whom I suppose you refer. Charming? Yes, so she is, but I had not noticed that—I was studying her heart."

The famous New York detective was entertaining a few friends at a "farewell" dinner at the hotel Mammoth, on the eve of his departure on a long-planned trip into the interior of South America.

"Why in thunder don't you go to Paris, Vienna, Berlin, or some of those lively joints, if you want to take a whirl?" his friend the inspector had asked, in much disgust, when he learned of Nick's plans.

"Everybody has been there," the detective had replied, with a smile.

"Well, then, take a tour to the north pole if you do not care for company," retorted the inspector, with a grin.

Besides the inspector, those who were gathered around Nick's table, in a quiet corner of the dining room, were the manager of the hotel, who had many times been a valued and enthusiastic aid of the detective; a banker, whose interest in his host had been stirred by his professional acumen and held by his personal worth; a politician with a predilection for finding out things, and Nick's protégé, friend, and first assistant, Chick Carter, who was to accompany the detective on his projected trip.

The woman, to whom the inspector had referred as being the subject of Nick's absorbed attention, sat at a table somewhat removed from the party of men. Several tables, at which diners were seated, were interposed between them.

The woman was seated so that she faced the detective. In front of her, with his back to Nick, sat a man.

The woman was strikingly handsome, with a dark face that betrayed a foreign origin, while her hair was blond. The contrast between her hair and her complexion was in itself sufficient to attract attention, while, without that cause, the exquisite modeling of her olive face would have been enough to have enchained even a fleeting glance.

"And pray what does your study of this woman's heart reveal, Nick?" asked the inspector, with a smile.

"Many things," said the detective soberly, as he again turned his eyes in the direction of the object of discussion. "I can read fear, abhorrence, love, hate, and bitter pain, all cloaked with a subtle feminine dissemblance."

"And is the gentleman in the hand-me-down evening clothes inspiring all these conflicting emotions, Carter?" inquired the banker, with a laugh. "I believe if I could stir up so many passions in a woman at one time I should take to parading Broadway, just to enjoy the sensation I should create among the matinée girls."

"No matinée girl is capable of feeling such passions as are now swaying that woman," replied the detective.

"Oh, come now, Nick, one would think that you could read her thoughts," broke in the inspector.

"I can—some of them," replied Nick quietly. "Did you hear what she said just now?"

"Hear what she said? Are you breeding bats in your belfry, Nick? How could any one hear at this distance, and in this babel of music and chatter?"

"I heard, or, at least, her lips told me," said the detective.

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten that little accomplishment of yours," said the inspector, with just a flash of a sneer. "And what did her lips say? Something pretty, judging by that angelic smile."

"I told you that she was dissembling."

"Ah, true; then how do you read her through the mask?"

"She helped me some with her last remark."

"What did she say?" asked the banker, who was thoroughly interested, even if the inspector was skeptical.

"'I, too, can kill!' Then she smiled that sweet smile that still lingers around her mouth."

The faces of the men around the table became suddenly grave, and they turned to look at the woman into whose mouth the detective had put these startling words.

"Great Scott, Nick, you make her out to be a beautiful devil!" broke in the hotel manager.

The detective leaned back in his chair, and quietly smoked for a minute; then he said:

"No; rather she is the victim of a devil."

"Do you know her?" asked the inspector, turning to the manager.

"Only as a guest at the hotel."

"Who is she?"

"She is registered as Mrs. Frank Dannenhauer."

"That's German, but I will bet she is not. Is that man her husband?"

The manager shrugged his shoulders.

"I never saw him before," he said. "She is alone at the hotel, except for her maid. She is leaving to-night. By the way, Nick, she goes by the way of Galveston. You may meet her."

At that moment the woman rose from the table, and, snatching her fan from the man's outstretched hand, wheeled from him, and left the room.

Notwithstanding the anger, almost abhorrence, that was revealed by her action, her features wore the same soft smile that with all—save for those at the detective's table—probably went at its face value.

The man, whose back was turned to the detective, followed her from the room, a few paces in the rear. There was something in his manner suggestive of subserviency—of that sort that is inborn. He was of medium stature, but the breadth of his back and the swing of his shoulders, indicated more than ordinary strength of body. His head was set on a short, muscular neck, and was thrust forward in a manner that meant bulldog tenacity. It was a striking back; one from which the man's character might be read almost as easily as from his face.

When they had left the dining room, Nick shook himself as if coming out of a reverie.

"I don't know why it is, but that couple has left an unpleasant impression on my mind," he said, with his eyes still fixed on the door through which the man and woman had passed.

"Did a fortune teller ever tell you that a dark woman would cross your path, Nick?" asked the inspector, with his jolly laugh. "But we cannot say dark woman, either; what shall we call her?"

"If I were writing fairy tales, I should call her the Princess of Sunshine and Shadow," said the detective.

The men talked on over their coffee and cigars, and presently the strange couple passed from their minds, Nick's projected journey being the subject of general conversation.

Finally, they all rose from the table, as if by common consent, and for a few minutes Nick was kept busy shaking hands with his guests, receiving their best wishes, and all the usual sort of thing that accompanies the wind-up of a farewell function.

Presently the detective was left alone with Chick, the hotel manager, and the inspector.

"Now," said Nick, "if you are going to help Chick and myself sail that boat up from Shelter Island to-morrow, it behooves us to get out of these glad rags and into something more serviceable, inspector. We should take that midnight train down."

Nick owned a large sloop yacht that was lying at Shelter Island, L. I., where he had been forced to leave her during a recent yachting trip, because of bad weather and the necessity for meeting an engagement in the city. He had offered to loan the yacht to the inspector during his absence, and the three men intended to go to Shelter Island that night, and sail the boat up to New Rochelle, near New York City, where the inspector had his summer home.

As Nick spoke, a clerk from the office of the hotel entered the dining room hurriedly. Casting a quick glance over the various tables, he spied the manager, and at once began to wend his way through the crowded room toward him.

When he reached the table, it was seen that his face was pale, and he looked frightened.

"Mr. Morrison," he said, in a trembling voice to the manager, "can I speak to you a moment?"

"Certainly," replied the manager, looking at the man wonderingly.

"Outside, if you please, sir."

He turned as if assured that the manager would follow him, and, Morrison, nodding to the others to come also, walked out in the wake of the clerk.

When they reached the lobby the man led the way to a deserted corner, and, when the manager had reached him, whispered hoarsely:

"There is a dead man in ten-ninety, sir!"

"Dead?" gasped the manager, now understanding the clerk's mysterious movements.

"Murdered!" continued the man, in an awed voice.

"How do you know that he was murdered?" asked Nick, quickly stepping forward. He had heard both of the clerk's whispered communications.

The man looked at the detective, whom he did not know, and then glanced at the manager questioningly.

"You may speak, Jones," said Morrison shortly.

"He lies face down on the floor, and there is a knife still sticking in his back!" gasped the clerk.

"Nick," said the manager, turning to the detective helplessly, "will you take charge?"

Nick nodded, and then turned to the clerk again.

"Who is the man?" he asked.

"A guest of the hotel who arrived this morning on the German steamer."

"His name?"

"He registered as Pedro Lopez."

"When and how did you learn that he had been murdered?"

"The electric bell in his room rang violently, but the boy who answered it could get no response, although he could hear some one moving in the room, and a sound as if a struggle was going on."

"And then?"

"He reported these facts to the office, and while he was speaking the bell rang again. I thought it was strange, and I went with him to the room. The door was locked, but I could hear sounds of heavy breathing. Thinking that something was wrong, I opened the door with a pass-key that I had brought with me from the office."

Here the man hesitated, his face expressive of horror.

"Well?" said Nick quickly.

"When I opened the door," continued the clerk stammeringly, "the man was lying on the floor, face down, as I have told you. There was blood on the floor, and the handle of the knife, or dagger, was sticking out from between the shoulders."

"Who else was in the room?"

"No one."

"And yet the bell rang twice, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"You searched the room?"

"N-no, sir. I went no farther than the threshold, after I saw the murdered man."

"You do not know, absolutely, that the man was dead, then?"

"No, sir, but I don't see how he could be alive with that knife sticking in him!"

"How many rooms are there in the suite?"

"Two rooms and bath."

"And you did not enter?"

"No, sir."

"Then the murderer might have still been in one of the rooms, for all you know?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do then?"

"I locked the door, and returned to the office, and then sought Mr. Morrison."

"You have told no one else?"

"No, sir."

"Come," said Nick, nodding to the others; "let us go to the rooms."

"You will not need me, sir?" asked the clerk anxiously. His nerves were unstrung.

"No," said Nick, "give me the key."

The man handed the detective the pass-key, and, followed by Chick, the inspector, and the manager, Nick led the way to the elevator.

They alighted at the fourth floor, at the direction of Morrison, who then led the way to room No. 1090.

The detective inserted the pass-key in the lock, after first listening a moment at the door. All was silent within.

Nick threw the door open, and stepped into the room quickly, followed by the others.

They stopped short, after crossing the throshold, and Nick uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

The room was empty!

CHAPTER II.

THE SEARCH FOR CLEWS.

Nick Carter stood for a moment in silence. His eyes, in a quick, comprehensive glance, took in every detail of the room they had entered.

There surely was nobody there, but, in partial corroboration of the story of the clerk, there was a fresh, dark stain on the heavy rug in front of a flat-topped mahogany table that stood near the center of the apartment.

Finally the detective turned to the astonished man behind him.

"Morrison," he said quietly, "will you please close and lock the door?"

The manager at once turned the key in the lock.

"Aren't you going to search the apartment, Nick?" he asked, as he stepped into the middle of the room, and glanced timidly at the door that opened into the bedroom.

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"It is useless," he said.

"Do you think the clerk saw what he described?"

Nick pointed to the dark stain on the rug.

"I think there is little doubt of that," he said.

"Then where is the body?"

"On that point, I am as ignorant as you—at present. May I ask you, inspector, to make your own observations, and then we can compare notes afterward. Morrison, will you kindly sit where you are until we are through? Chick!"

The detective's assistant stepped up to him, and, after a few words in an undertone, he left the room, Nick turning the key in the lock after his departure.

The manager nervously seated himself, and the detective and the inspector of police, as calmly as if they had been looking for a lost article of small value, began a careful examination of the rooms.

For a long time Nick studied the stain on the rug, which was still wet. Then each article of furniture was examined, and, with his microscope in hand, he made his way slowly through the apartment, and into the next room.

The detective was closely followed by the inspector, and after half an hour the two men returned to the parlor, or reception room of the suite, where Morrison had sat in silence during their investigations.

Nick seated himself in an armchair, and taking out his cigar case offered it to his companions. When they had lighted their cigars, he turned to the inspector, and said:

"You have made up your cast of characters, inspector?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Three men and the victim."

"What sort of men?"

"One was a medium-sized man, apparently dressed in civilian's clothes. The others were men of short stature, and their feet were bare."

"Right. And the woman?"

"The woman?" asked the inspector, in surprise.

"Yes, the woman."

"But there was no woman."

"Pardon me, inspector, but there was a woman in this room, either when the murder was done, or just after it. It is not probable that she arrived afterward. Therefore,

it is safe to say that the murder—if it be a murder—was committed when she was present."

"But why a woman at all, Nick?"

"Because there are physical signs of her presence, inspector."

"I have not seen them."

"If you will take my microscope you will find in the middle of that stain of blood on the rug, the mark of a small steel hairpin that has been pressed into the heavy nap, probably by the weight of a foot."

The inspector took the glass which the detective handed to him, and examined the rug.

"The mark is there," he said, as he rose, and handed the microscope back to Nick; "but I cannot see that it proves the presence of a woman. In the first place, that hairpin might have been dropped there a month ago."

"That is scarcely complimentary to our friend Morrison's housekeeper," said Nick, with a smile. "But admitting that it was dropped there a month ago, it would then be there now, would it not? We have the mark of a hairpin ground into the rug—and the hairpin is gone."

"Yes, it is gone, Nick," said the inspector, a little petulantly, "but I do not see what that proves."

"If it had been dropped some time ago, and removed in the ordinary course of cleaning—by a broom, or by beating the rug—the sign of it would have been obliterated, would it not?"

"Yes," admitted the inspector grudgingly.

"Instead of that we have a well-defined mark showing where the hairpin was trodden into the rug."

"But the hairpin is not there now."

"Quite true. Therefore it becomes important, for if it were there now it would mean nothing. In that case it might have been dropped at any time and have been overlooked by careless cleaners. But it was not overlooked by those who recently occupied this room! It was carefully removed, and, if you will use my glass again, you will see the mark of a finger nail in the pile of the rug, showing where it was picked up—since the stain was made!"

"Even admitting your argument to be true, Nick, wouldn't the hairpin have been removed, anyway, if the murderers had found it, in their efforts to obliterate all clews, even if it had lain there for weeks before they entered the apartment?"

"No; for had there been no woman whose presence they wished to conceal, they would have left the hairpin in their own interests, rather than have removed it. Now, inspector, will you take my glass again? Examine the top of that mahogany table, and tell me what you find."

The police official again took the microscope that Nick handed to him, and made a cursory examination of the top of the center table.

"I see nothing there, Nick," he said presently, "except some finger marks that do not mean anything to me."

"I think that if you look carefully you can find more. That is a very highly polished surface, and particularly sensitive to contact with the human hand. A mere touch will dull the surface, while a sufficient pressure will leave almost as clear an imprint as one could obtain in wax. As it happens, the atmosphere has been particularly favorable for such a demonstration to-day. If you will look here, and here"—Nick pointed, as he spoke, to two points on the edge of the table, near the center—"I think you will find the unmistakable imprints of two hands, or the heels of two hands. Are they there, inspector?"

"They are, sure enough, Nick."

The police official had now lost all his momentary antagonism to Nick's views. His pride had been touched at first, because he had overlooked the hairpin, but it was not his nature to be long surly over defeat, particularly by his friend, and he now displayed the usual keen interest that the fine deductions of Nick Carter always aroused in him.

"Now we are getting on, inspector," said the detective. "What do the marks tell you?"

"That a woman stood here with her back to the table, clutching the edge of it with her hands."

"Right. And she was not merely leaning against the edge of the table, but, as you say, she was clutching it, for the imprints show that even to the marks of the overlapping fingers. This would not have been the case if she had simply rested her fingers on the table. And there, too, is the mark where her ring marred the edge. Do we add a woman to our cast of characters, inspector?"

"Yes, Nick."

"Very well, then, let us dispose of this party of murderers who recently occupied this room in our friend Morrison's pleasant hostelry. What has become of the actors in this tragedy?"

"Don't rub it in, Nick, old man; it's tough enough as it is," said Morrison.

"Right you are, Morrison," said Nick, smiling at the expression of half interest and half fright that had settled itself on the manager's face. "You see my position in the matter is a little unusual for me. As our Long Island fox hunters would say: I have found the brush, but I shall have to let the inspector take the brush, for I shall be in South America when he runs down the quarry."

"Say, now, Nick, you are not going to run off and leave me with this confounded case on my hands, are you?" asked the inspector, with a laugh that was tinged with appeal.

At this moment there were two sharp raps at the door, and Nick quickly unlocked it, and threw it open. Chick entered, and the detective at once closed and locked the door again.

"Chick," he asked, "did you get those tickets to-day?"

"Surest thing you know, Nick. We are booked to start day after to-morrow."

"You see, inspector," said Nick, shrugging his shoulders, "Fate has decreed; it is up to you."

"Very well, then, the best I can expect is to make as much use of you as the limited time at my disposal will permit. But seriously, Nick, what do you make of it?"

CHAPTER III.

AFTER THE BLOW WAS STRUCK.

Nick Carter stood for a moment without speaking, his eyes fixed on the doorway that led from the main room of the suite into the bedroom. Then he threw himself carelessly down on a small divan that stood, piled up with cushions, in one corner of the room.

"This is what I make of it," he said, after a long pause, taking up the inspector's remark as if it had just been uttered: "So far as I am able, I will arrange the prob-

able facts, with now and then a blank that I am at present unable to fill in. All speculation will, of course, be absent. That I cannot possibly supply without knowing the identity of the actors.

"Now, in the first place, it is safe to assume that the man who was struck down in this room—I would say murdered, except that we are lacking the body, and the man may yet be alive, although that is really not probable—is the one who registered as Pedro Lopez——"

"But that is not at all sure, Nick," interrupted the inspector.

"I am not stating it as a fact; only as a reasonable assumption, and, in Lopez, we get the only real identity with which we have to deal in the case, so far. And further, this fact seems to be fairly well established by the clerk who discovered the body."

"But, according to his story, he did not see the man's face."

"True, but he expressed no doubt as to the man's identity when I questioned him. A man may sometimes be as readily recognized by his back as by his face. But understand me, inspector, I said, simply, that it was fair to assume that Lopez is the man. At least, we have no better starting point. For the purposes of this investigation, then, let us assume that the man who was stabbed in this room was Pedro Lopez.

"Now, there was in the room, at the time that the blow was struck, at least one other person, naturally; and either at the time that the blow was struck, or immediately afterward, there were present three others. Of the four persons, besides the victim, three were men and one was a woman. Of the three men, two were barefooted. These men were of a short stature, and were foreigners of a savage, or semisavage, race."

"How do you arrive at that rather remarkable conclusion, Nick?"

"Let me state my case first, and I will answer your questions afterward."

"All right, old man, go ahead."

"That leaves us a man and a woman to account for, and there is nothing to show that they were not clad in the conventional garments of civilization. Now, were all four of these actors in the tragedy present when the blow was struck? That I cannot determine, but the party of four can be divided into two parts, which may help in settling this point.

"The man and the woman who were clothed in twentieth-century garb entered the apartment by way of the door, we may presume, while the gentlemen who wore no shoes or socks, came in by way of the fire escape. And each party of two made their exit in the way they had entered."

"Go on, Nick," laughed the inspector. "There is nothing I enjoy more, now and then, than a good fairy story!"

"Now, let us suppose," continued the detective, paying no attention to the interruption of the inspector, "that all four were present when the blow was struck, or immediately afterward; and, as all have disappeared, and the body of the victim has been spirited away, it is safe to say that they were all acting in concert; or, at least, they were all bound together so that they moved in accord in an effort to block the natural investigation that would follow. If we admit this, then, and consider the different methods of entry into the apartment, what is the natural inference?"

"Nick, I just plumb give it up," said the inspector, who was inclined to be facetious, and on whom the detective's deductions had made no impression. But Nick continued without a change of countenance:

"The natural inference is that the man and the woman baited the trap, that the bare-footed savages crept in over the fire escape, and struck the fatal blow. But this is not in keeping with the nature of such creatures. Their instinct is to strike and flee. Now not only did they not flee, but they remained and removed the body. So, for the moment, let us eliminate them as the actual slayers. That, then, leaves us with the man and the woman of the civilized type to deal with. Did the man or the woman strike the blow? Seemingly the woman, since there was a struggle in which she took an active part. But this theory is upset by the fact that there was a call for help from the room. That is to say, some one pushed the call bell twice.

"Now, that is the act of a woman. Had the woman struck the blow, against the wishes of the man—I mean the man who presumably accompanied the woman—he would have dealt with her himself before alarming the hotel. Therefore, I should say that the man struck the blow, and that the woman either struggled to prevent it, or, afterward, to reach the bell, and was thrown heavily against the table, which she clutched to save herself from falling. The supposition that the victim pressed the call bell—twice—is not tenable. In the first place, he would not have done so until he realized his danger, and, as he was struck in the back, that would have been impossible."

By degrees, the skeptical expression that had settled upon the face of the inspector, as the detective pictured the probable scene in the apartment, had been dissipated, and, as Nick paused for a moment in his reading of the physical evidence that they had discovered, the police official evinced a growing interest.

"Go on, Nick," he said, as the detective paused; "you have pretty near got me guessing now."

"But there is another reading of signs, inspector," continued Nick. "There is the possibility of a struggle between the two men, which the woman watched, either in fright or eager interest, her back against the table, and her hands clutching the edges in nervous excitement. Seeing that the battle was going the wrong way, she may have struck the fatal blow. Now, inspector, let us have your theory."

"I have no theory, Nick. I am quite willing to admit that your deductions are quite reasonable, but unfortunately we cannot bring them to one focus."

"Quite true, inspector, for if we could, we should know who struck the blow."

"At least, I should like to know why you have decided that the men are, as you have described them, semisavages."

"That is simple. You discovered that these men were bare-footed. How? By the almost obliterated footprints, marked in blood, on the tiled floor of the bathroom."

"Yes."

"Those prints were made by men accustomed to go barefoot. Surely, only savages follow that custom nowadays."

"But how do you determine that it is the habit of these men to go barefoot, Nick?"

"As easy as the proverbial rolling off a log. The footprints of a man who is accustomed to wearing shoes, and

has but recently removed them, is as distinctly different from those of a man who is not used to footgear, as the mark of a shod and a naked foot. The civilized man's foot, from being long incased in shoes, loses its natural shape. It is more compact than the natural foot, which spreads out over much more surface. The imprint of the toes, alone, will tell the story. Each is definitely and distinctly marked."

"But how do you know that they entered by way of the fire escape?"

"That also is plain. You will find the imprints—partial ones—in the dust on the narrow iron bars that form the floor of the structure. And, further than that, there are no marks of shod feet there, which shows that the other man, and the woman, did not enter by that way, and it is therefore reasonable to presume that they came through the door, like any ordinary visitor.

"Now, let us return to our savage friends: They came by the fire escape, and left—with the body—by the same means. Now, where did they go? The fire-escape gallery on this floor connects with three apartments—this and the two on either side—and, also, by going up or down the ladder, with the tiers of three apartments above and below. They did not go up nor down, as the footprints show, but they did come from, and go back into, the suite on the right, and that is occupied by——"

Here Nick turned to his assistant who had been quietly listening, and who now replied to Nick's look of interrogation:

"Mrs. Franz Dannenhauer and her maid, until a short time ago. It is now vacant."

The men looked at one another for a moment in amazed silence, and then Nick said quietly:

"Finding the apartment had been vacated, you brought the key, Chick, I suppose?"

Chick nodded in the affirmative.

"Let us take a look at the rooms," said the detective, opening the door, and leading the way.

Taking the key from his assistant, Nick opened the door of the adjoining suite, passed quickly in, and, holding the door open until the others had entered, closed and locked it.

On the center table were some pieces of crumpled tissue paper, an empty box that had contained soap, a piece of twine, and other odds and ends that might be found in a room after the process of packing.

Nick stood for a moment taking in all the details of the apartment. Then he passed quickly through the rooms, returning again before the others had stirred from the door by which they had entered.

After a moment's silence, Nick turned to Chick and asked:

"How many pieces of luggage did Mrs. Franz Dannenhauer bring with her?"

"Two trunks."

"And she took away two trunks?"

"Two trunks were checked and removed by the transfer company. A third trunk, or large sample case, was removed by an express company."

"Ah! When was the sample case brought here?"

"There is no record of such a piece of baggage at the office."

Well trained in the methods of his chief, Chick, when he had been sent to make certain inquiries that had at once suggested themselves to Nick, had made just such an investigation as he believed the detective himself would have made, and was therefore prepared to answer any question that might be asked—and Nick knew that he would be when he had sent him from the room in the other suite.

"You mean that no such trunk was received in the ordinary way?" continued the detective.

"Yes. The only thing that is known of it at the office is that, five minutes after the trunks were taken away by the transfer company, an expressman called for the trunk of Mrs. Dannenhauer's maid."

"Did the clerk notice the name of the express company?"

"No. The gentleman who took charge of the removal of Mrs. Dannenhauer's baggage said that it was the trunk of her maid, and that it was not going with the other baggage, as the girl was not going to make the trip with Mrs. Dannenhauer."

"Was it apparently a regular express company?"

"No; it was one of those small outfits that can be picked up on the corner for odd jobs."

"The wagon had a license number?"

"Yes, but no one took any notice of it. Of course, there was no suspicion attaching to the occurrence."

"And the driver?"

"Apparently a dago, the clerk says, and he had an assistant with him who helped carry the trunk to the freight elevator."

"Humph! And how did the maid leave the hotel?"

"In the carriage with Mrs. Dannenhauer."

"Was the carriage engaged from the office?"

"Yes."

"Well, inspector," said Nick, turning to the police official, 'I bequeath to you the task of unraveling this crime."

"You believe that the body was removed in the trunk that went in the express wagon?"

"Certainly."

"Then why not wire, and have Mrs. Dannenhauer held at some place en route?"

"Don't you think that would be getting a little beyond your warrant of law, inspector? Where is the body?"

"By Jove! I had not thought of that. We haven't any murder without the body, have we?"

"Absolutely not."

"Then, what am I to do?"

"Find the body."

"You can say that right smart, Nick; and it sounds first rate, but how am I to do it?"

"That is up to you, inspector; but, inasmuch as you are placed in a position where you will have to report a murder without having any body to produce, it would be my advice for you to wait until that body turns up before you take any action in the matter. Absolutely, the only evidence that there was a dead man in that room is provided by the clerk of the hotel. Unless you wish to set out on a search for a body, you are lacking the usual basis of a murder charge."

"Well, then, what would you advise me to do, Nick?"

"I am not offering any advice, but if I were in your position I should simply sit tight until I had something to work on."

"Then you would not advise me to make an effort to find the body?" asked the inspector, with a note of relief in his voice.

"Now, look here, inspector, you are just as competent

as I am to decide that question. Suppose, for instance, that a man should come into your station house and tell you simply the story that we heard from the clerk of this hotel, and then you had learned that there was no body in the room—what would you do?"

"I should turn him loose as a harmless lunatic."

"Exactly. Then let us consider that you have turned him loose, and we will catch that train, and bring up the boat, just as if nothing had happened to interfere with our plans as we originally laid them."

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE FIND.

After making an official report to headquarters, with instructions that nothing be given out for publication until his return, the inspector prepared to accompany the detective and his assistant to Shelter Island.

The trip down was uneventful, and they started back in the yacht for New Rochelle with a fair breeze that gave every indication of landing them at their moorings by daylight the next day. But the elements were not the only things to be reckoned with on that trip.

Both Nick and Chick were competent sailors, and knew the waters of the Sound thoroughly; but, notwithstanding this fact, Chick, while at the tiller, managed to put the boat on the rocks off Cornfield Light, which he had mistaken for Fisher's.

"Now what?" asked Chick, with a grin, after they had tried in vain to get the boat off the rocks.

"It looks very much as if we were hard and fast on the rocks until the tide comes in," said Nick, "and, as there is a heavy fog settling down, it seems to me that we had better make the best of the situation until daylight. We have plenty to eat, drink, and smoke on board, so that we shall not suffer any hardships by the delay."

The sail was lowered and furled, and everything made shipshape aboard, and then the anchor was thrown over, with plenty of play of cable, in case they should float during the night.

"Now," said Nick, as he made himself comfortable on the cushions in the standing room, "we had better draw lots for the anchor watch. There is no need of all hands sitting up, and while we are well out of the course of any steamers, I think it would be just as well if one of us kept an eye on things, for we shall have to get out a stern line if we come off the rocks before daylight."

Lots were drawn, and the watch fell to the detective. Chick and the inspector at once went below, and, selecting a couple of berths in the cabin, were soon fast asleep.

In the meantime, Nick took some cushions from the seats in the standing room and placed them in the lee of the cabin roof. Lighting a fresh cigar, he lounged there, smoking and thinking, in the darkness. In his mind he rehearsed the strange crime that had been perpetrated in the Hotel Mammoth—a crime, the evidence of which was furnished by only one witness; a murder without the *corpus delicti*. And yet Nick did not for a moment doubt the testimony of the clerk. The bloodstain on the rug and his own investigation satisfied him that the man had seen what he described.

And the woman who had registered as Mrs. Franz Dannenhauer—the beautiful brunette with the blond hair?

In his mind, Nick could not help connecting her with the crime. But how? Surely not as the slayer! But according to his deductions a woman had at least been a witness of the murder.

But the man—her companion in the dining room?

Nick shrugged his shoulders. He had seen only his back, but that back had made a strange impression on him. And the woman's words, that he had read through the movement of her lips, rang in his ears as plainly as if he had heard them uttered:

"I, too, can kill!"

Did this remark of the woman have any connection with the murder in room No. 1090?

"Pshaw! What's the use?" muttered the detective finally, after he had gone over and over the strange circumstances in the case. "I am confident that a man was killed in room number ten-ninety, Hotel Mammoth, but, lacking the very first essential—the dead body—I am faced with an algebraic problem, and murder mysteries were never solved by algebra. There is certainly a strong element of interest in the case, and I should like to take hold of it, even in its present shape, but I think I shall have to leave it to the inspector."

The detective looked at his watch. It was nearly midnight, and he was about to call Chick to take his turn on deck, when he heard a slight splash in the water just astern of the boat.

"I wonder what that was?" thought Nick, rousing himself, and throwing away his cigar.

Stepping to the side of the boat, he looked off across the dark water. As he did so, something struck against the side of the boat. At the same moment Nick heard a shrill whistle that seemed to come from directly under the counter of the yacht.

"That's strange," he muttered. "I wonder if any boat has anchored near us without setting her lights? I wonder, too, what it was that bumped against our side?"

The darkness and the now deeply settled fog made it impossible to see a few feet beyond the boat. The detective dropped down on the narrow strip of deck, between the gunwale and the roof of the cabin, and peered down into the night.

Indistinctly he could make out a dark object that was floating slowly to the stern of the boat.

"Probably a log," he thought; "but how about that whistle?"

Instinctively he reached down and caught the object just as it was about to float beyond his reach.

In a moment he knew that it was not a log!

His fingers had touched what seemed to be water-soaked cloth! And, as he touched it, his fingers closed firmly, and the next instant he realized that he had hold of the clothing of a man, and that the object in the water was a body—whether dead or alive he could not tell.

Exerting all his great strength, Nick dragged the body out of the water, and into the standing room of the yacht.

Again that shrill whistle sounded, and again it seemed to come from the water almost at the stern of the boat.

The flash of his pocket lamp told Nick that the body he had dragged from the water was that of a man, and that he was dead!

The next instant the detective sprang to the side of the boat, and peered down into the darkness in search of the origin of the whistle.

As he leaned over the overhang of the stern, he uttered a sharp cry of surprise, and involuntarily started back.

He was looking into a pair of glaring eyes, set in a lean, brown face that was lifted out of the black water!

Before Nick had fully recovered from his surprise, a dark-skinned hand and arm were thrown over the gunwale of the boat, and a dark, shining, naked body was drawn lithely out of the water!

In another moment the man would have dragged himself aboard the yacht, but Nick had now recovered from the first sight of the countenance of the forbidding creature. His fist shot out, taking the man fairly between the eyes. With a gasp, the creature sank back into the water again.

But during the brief time that the detective had been engaged with this man, a rowboat had glided up to the bow of the yacht, a dark form had leaped silently on the deck, and now, as the man whom Nick had struck fell back, another form sprang through the air from the top of the cabin, and Nick was borne to the deck, with a pair of sinewy hands fixed upon his throat!

It was impossible for Nick to cry out, for that clutch upon his throat entirely shut off his wind, and at the same time he felt a naked body entwining itself around him, and he fell forward under the impetus of his assailant's spring.

At this moment the sliding doors of the cabin were pushed aside, and the inspector sprang out.

"What's the row, Nick?" he called, and the next moment he had stumbled over the bodies of the struggling men.

In another instant he had become part of the mass of battling humanity, and, although still half dazed by being suddenly awakened from sleep, he at once took an active part in the fray.

By this time, however, the detective had recovered from his first surprise at the unexpected assault, and his skill and strength were slowly overcoming his antagonist. Suddenly, with a jujutsu twist, he released the man's hold on his throat, and the next moment he had him pinned on the deck, while he held his hands with a grip of iron.

"Get a rope, inspector," he gasped, "and tie this fellow up. He is the real thing in a rough-and-tumble scrap."

The inspector found some extra sail stops in the cuddy in the cabin, and he soon had the fighting stranger securely bound.

"What's the matter, Nick?. What's all this about?" he asked, as they finally recovered their breath, and, at Nick's suggestion, had laid their prisoner out on the seats in the standing room. "Who is this black devil?"

"I don't know any more than you do, inspector, but I have a strong hunch."

"What's your hunch, Nick? I have always noticed that your one best bet usually wins, whether you play it on a hunch or on form."

"I think, before I do any speculating, I will look over the body of the dead man," replied the detective.

"Dead man?" cried the inspector, in amazement. "Your friend is the liveliest dead man I ever saw."

"I mean the body behind you," said Nick quietly, indicating the still form that lay on the opposite side of the standing room.

As the inspector turned quickly and peered into the darkness, Chick climbed sleepily out of the cabin.

"What in thunder are you fellows making such a racket about?" he inquired, as he stood in the companionway trying to make out what had been going on on deck.

"Get a lantern, Chick," said Nick sharply. "We have taken on a couple of new passengers, and one of them is a dead one."

With an exclamation of surprise, Chick, now wide awake, darted back into the cabin, and presently reappeared with a lantern, which he handed to the detective.

Nick held the lantern so that its rays fell full on the face of the dead man.

He was apparently about thirty years of age, smooth-faced, and with a German cast of countenance. His hair was light and brushed straight back from his forehead, pompadour style. His face was clean-cut, and showed marked evidences of strength of character. The chin was firm and straight, and the forehead broad and white. It was the face of a man of more than ordinary intelligence, who had belonged in the higher walks of life. The hands were white but strong, as if the man had been an athlete, and this was borne out by the well-molded form that showed, even beneath the wet and bedraggled clothing, which was of fine material, and cut in the latest fashion.

"Turn him on his face," said Nick, after making a cursory examination of the body. Chick and the inspector gently rolled the body over, so that his broad back was upturned, and both Chick and the inspector uttered a sharp cry.

Nick Carter was unmoved. It seemed almost as if he had expected to see the bloodstain between the shoulders, and the sharp gash in the cloth that showed where a knife had entered the back.

"Inspector," said Nick quietly, "there is your missing dead man, and here is one of the black devils that spirited the body out of the Hotel Mammoth!"

CHAPTER V.

THE GOLDEN-HAIR CLEW.

For some time the inspector stood in silence, gazing at the body of the dead man, and then his glance shifted to the little black man, who, though bound hand and foot, evinced a lively interest in the proceedings by his snapping eyes, that followed every movement of the detective.

"By thunder, Nick!" said the police official, after a long pause, "I begin to believe that you are right."

"I do not think there is any doubt of it."

"And still it may be nothing but a coincidence."

"That is true, inspector, but I do not believe it. Here we have a body that corresponds with the one that is missing from the Hotel Mammoth—so far as the wound is concerned. And we also have two men with bare feet."

"Two men?" asked the inspector, in surprise.

"Yes, there are two of them. The other chap got away, however."

Nick then related what had occurred while his companions were below.

"The theory certainly is not unreasonable, Nick," said Chick, when his chief had finished. "But how did they ever get out here with the body; and what has become of the man you knocked back into the water?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"You know as much as I do about that, Chick," he said. "Nevertheless, coincidence or not, the facts cannot be ignored. Let us take a look at the dead man."

As he spoke, Nick dropped on his knees beside the body, and made a careful search of the clothing. The ex-

amination revealed nothing but two letters, which he found in the breast pocket of the man's coat, and which only served to make the mystery deeper. Every other pocket was as empty as if it had been robbed, or as if his slayers had taken special pains to remove anything that might serve to identify him. This theory, however, did not seem tenable, since the letters, meaningless though they were, had been left in the coat. They were, of course, water-soaked, and Nick removed the inclosures from the envelopes with great care. Spreading them out in the light of the lantern, he read the following aloud:

"DEAREST FRANZ: You know how well I shall be guarded, but, nevertheless, I shall try to reach you when you arrive.

"Cazanova undoubtedly knows of our plans, and it may be either your life, mine, or his. But I have determined to risk it. I must take the chance. I cannot remain here longer. It is a living death. It is hard to think of my people in this way, but the light of the outside world has entered, and my soul yearns for a broader life—that life that you promised me.

"God grant that we shall be able to live in peace outside of this narrow circle that is now binding me like a band of steel, and warping all my better nature, until I seem to be but a puppet in the hands of Cazanova.

"Why should I be sacrificed because I chose to lead my own life with the man I love? We have both proven that we can be true to Yomen, and yet live our own lives, outside, in the world.

"There is a heavy cloud enveloping me, dear one, but I shall be with you on your arrival, if Yomen and Cazanova let me live. God bless you, and with all my love until we meet. ZORA."

"Well, Nick, what do you make out of that truck?" asked Chick, when the detective had finished reading the remarkable letter.

"My dear Chick, one might erect any number of fanciful structures on the basis of this letter, but I can see no reason for our doing so. It is quite evident that it is a letter written by a woman who is fleeing from some circumscribed and fanatical life to a broader one in the outside world; and it is written to the man she loves. This is her lover"—pointing to the dead stranger—"and either Yomen or Cazanova has overtaken him."

"And who are the Messieurs Yomen and Cazanova?"

"Evidently a pair of very bloodthirsty gentlemen, Chick," said the detective, smiling. "I think, however, that I am acquainted with Mr. Yomen."

Chick looked at his chief in some surprise.

"What do you mean by that, Nick?" he asked. "Is the gentleman on our books?"

"No. Perhaps I should say that I have heard of him. He is more or less a mythical person."

"Huh! He doesn't sound very mythical in that letter."

"The Yomen to whom I refer is in the Mahatma class, and rules over the destinies of a mysterious country in South America."

"A sort of common, or garden variety of spook, eh?"

"Not a common variety, if he is the Yomen I have in mind, Chick."

"And this Cazanova? Is he a side partner of the other guy?"

"I never before heard of Cazanova."

"Well, Nick, you have my kind permission to keep all your knowledge of these gents to yourself, as you do not seem to be very free in handing it out."

Chick spoke with some annoyance apparent in his tone.

"I will tell you all I know at the proper time, Chick," said the detective sharply. "Just at present we have another letter to consider."

As he spoke, Nick spread out in the light of the lantern the other paper that he had found in the pocket of the dead man.

This, however, proved to be as puzzling as the first. It read:

"Mammoth. Own name. Be careful."

This was all. There was no signature and no address. The words, however, were undoubtedly written in a feminine hand; apparently the same that had penned the first letter.

"Huh!" grunted Chick, who had not yet recovered his better nature. "What do you make of that? Another one of Zora's effusions, eh?"

Nick made no reply, but carefully folded both papers and put them in his pocketbook.

"Who is this Zora, Nick, anyway? Is she on your visiting list along with that Yomen chap?" continued Chick, refusing to be snubbed by his chief.

The detective smiled at his assistant's evident pique.

"I think if we follow out my theory of the Hotel Mammoth murder," he said presently, "we shall find that Zora is the woman of the golden hair, and that the man—that man—was Franz Dannenhauer, alias Pedro Lopez, of room number ten-ninety."

As he spoke, Nick pointed to the body of the dead man.

"Then you think that she killed him?"

"I have not said so."

"But your theory would indicate that you thought so."

"My theory may be capable of elaboration."

"Aren't you jumping at conclusions, Nick?" asked the inspector, who had been silent for some time.

The detective did not answer, but stood looking down at the body, and then suddenly dropped on his knees again. After fumbling for a moment with the front of the man's coat, he rose to his feet, while he quickly wound something around the first two fingers of his left hand.

There was not light enough for the others to see what he had found, but his motions indicated that he was wrapping something like a thread around his fingers. Without a word he placed the invisible object in one of the compartments of his pocketbook.

"What have you struck, Nick?" asked his assistant, whose familiarity with his chief's methods told him that the detective had discovered something of importance.

"Something that may prove of value in unraveling this mystery."

"A clew?"

"Yes, a golden-hair clew," replied Nick, his face now stern and thoughtful.

"From the head of Mrs. Franz Dannenhauer?" asked the inspector, laughing.

"Yes; unless all my deductions fail."

"And I would be willing to wager that that woman is innocent of any crime," cried Chick quickly.

"So would I, Chick; but a golden hair, caught around a button on that dead man's coat, must be explained before Mrs. Dannenhauer can be eliminated from the case."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK'S STRANGE CALLER.

"What are you going to do with him, Nick?" asked the inspector, pointing to the little brown man, who had been watching every movement of the detective out of his narrowed eyes.

"I am going to take him home with me," replied Nick quietly.

"Take him home?" queried the inspector, in surprise. "Why don't you lock him up? We might be able to get something out of him."

"We are pretty good friends, inspector, and I know that you will pardon me if I say that I believe that I can get more out of him than the police can, eh?"

"You have demonstrated the truth of that statement before, Nick," said the inspector, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I guess we will not quarrel about that. But I should be obliged to you if you would let me in on your dope sheet, for I admit that I am absolutely at sea."

"I make no more out of it than you can, inspector, with the same facts before you."

"But I cannot work out your theory, old chap. You set up a murder at the Hotel Mammoth as a premise, when we——"

"There is where you are mistaken, inspector. I do not set up any such proposition. In fact, I propose to eliminate any possible consideration of a murder in the Mammoth. I will even go further than that: I will eliminate everything that happened at the Hotel Mammoth. I will cut out the golden-haired woman and her escort; the supposed discovery of a dead body in ten-ninety; the evidence we discovered in that apartment, showing that a murder had been committed and that a body had been removed to and from the rooms of Mrs. Franz Dannenhauer—I will eliminate even Mrs. Franz Dannenhauer and her maid. Let us consider that none of these things existed, inspector."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, what have you got to work on, Nick?"

"Just this," said the detective, quietly pointing to the body of the man he had dragged from the Sound. "We will begin right here: I pick up the dead body of a man who has been stabbed in the back. While I am doing this, two little brown men attempt to assault me. One of them escapes, the other I make a prisoner. There you have absolutely nothing but cold, hard facts. Does that satisfy you?"

"I admit that I cannot follow you, Nick. Go ahead in your own way. If you will only take charge of the case, I will be satisfied."

As no one was inclined to sleep, all hands kept watch until daylight, when, with the incoming tide, they succeeded in clearing the yacht from the rocks. It was found that she had not been seriously damaged, and they promptly set sail for Bridgeport, reaching there early in the forenoon.

The inspector at once communicated with the local police, and the body of the mysterious dead man was removed to the morgue. As Nick did not, at that time, choose to divulge his suspicions as to the identity of the man, it was simply stated that the body had been picked up during the night in the Sound. The presence of the little brown prisoner aboard the yacht was not disclosed.

While the inspector was attending to these details, Nick and Chick sought a telephone. When the detective had been connected with his house, he gave Joseph, his confidential servant, some brief instructions, and then turned to Chick.

"You know Jameson, the theatrical costumer here, Chick?" he said.

"I do, very well," responded the assistant, with a smile. "I take it, Nick, that I am to remain in Bridgeport."

"Right. Get Jameson to fix you up with some sort of a disguise, and then watch the morgue. I do not need to give you any instructions. You know what to do as well as I. But don't let any one get away from you."

"Particularly the gentleman in hand-me-down evening clothes, as our friend described him, eh, Nick?" said Chick, with a smile.

"Exactly. But there are other possibilities. There is another little brown man, and a woman with golden hair."

"But she is already far on her way to the South," answered Chick, with some surprise.

"I am not at all sure of that, Chick. At all events, she is a possibility."

"Very well."

Before joining the inspector on the yacht again, Nick made one more call—upon the editor of a local newspaper, with whom he was well acquainted, and shortly afterward the following dispatch was wired to all of the New York papers:

"While Nicholas Carter, the New York detective, was sailing his yacht up the Sound last night, he picked up the body of a dead man in the water. The man had not been drowned, as the detective thought, when he first pulled the body aboard his boat, but had evidently been killed by a stab in the back, as Carter soon discovered when making an examination of the body.

"There was nothing in the clothing of the dead man by which the body could be identified except two mysterious letters, the purport of which was unintelligible. The detective put into Bridgeport, and the body was taken to the morgue, where it now lies awaiting identification.

"A strange reference to a person called Yomen, as apparently connected in some way with the dead man, may help to solve the mystery."

"Where is Chick?" asked the inspector, when Nick climbed over the side of the yacht alone.

"I have left him to take care of a few matters in Bridgeport," said Nick, with a smile.

"Oh, yes, I know. The old morgue game, eh? Watching the callers? But I cannot see what you are going to get out of that, Nick, when the murder was committed in New York."

"What makes you think that the murder was committed in New York, inspector?"

"Didn't Jones see the body, or at least what you claimed must have been a body?" replied the inspector, somewhat testily.

"And I have told you that I know nothing more about the body that I picked up than the mere facts that surround that incident."

"Do you mean to tell me, Nick Carter, that you propose to work this case on the bare fact of the discovery of the body in the Sound—without taking into consideration the circumstances that preceded it at the Hotel Mammoth, and which it is natural to concede have some bearing on the case?"

"I have already told you so."

"But I did not think that you were in earnest in the matter. How can you discard the very facts that you have set up as a possible solution of the murder?"

"You have already called my attention to the fact that this body, which we have picked up under unusual circumstances, has no logical connection with the supposed body which the clerk of the Mammoth says he saw. Is not that true?"

"Yes, that's all right, Nick, but in the first place you get me all tangled up with a theory that includes a bunch of little brown men. Then the brown men materialize, together with a body, and I cannot untangle the two."

"Nevertheless, that is what we will do, inspector."

It was late in the afternoon when they reached New Rochelle, and Nick at once went ashore. Danny was waiting for him with the automobile.

Under cover of darkness they removed their prisoner from the yacht to the car. The little man had not uttered a word since his capture, but not a movement had escaped his eager, snapping eyes.

"Let her out, Danny," said Nick, when they were all aboard the car, with the prisoner at their feet in the tonneau. "Never mind the speed limit."

Danny, while a careful driver, was never averse to putting the car through its paces, and they fairly flew over the deserted Westchester roads. At the outskirts of the city proper, at a word from Nick, they dropped into a more conservative speed, and finally swept up to the curb in front of the detective's residence on Madison Avenue.

Nick leaped out of the car as it came to a stop, and, seizing the little man at the bottom of the tonneau in his arms, much as if he had been a baby, hurried up the steps of his house. When he reached the top, the faithful Joseph, who had evidently been awaiting the return of his master, threw the door wide open, and the detective darted into the hall with his burden.

Patsy Garvan, one of his valued assistants, met him at the threshold.

"Take him upstairs, Patsy," said Nick, as he set the man on his feet and released his legs from the bonds that held them.

"Been to a minstrel show, chief?" asked Patsy, with a grin, as the hall light fell on the swarthy face of the little prisoner.

"Into the strong room with him, Patsy," said Nick.

"Surest thing you know, chief," replied Patsy, as he swung the man around so that he was headed for the stairs.

"Now, inspector, if you will step into——"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Joseph, who had stood imperturbably at the side of the hall until all were inside. "There is a lady waiting for you in the library."

Nick frowned slightly, without speaking. His orders were that no one should be admitted to the house during his absence.

"I could not help it, sir," said Joseph, who had correctly interpreted the cloud on his chief's face. "She insisted upon remaining, and I could not put her out, you know, sir."

"Quite right, Joseph," replied the detective, the look and feeling of annoyance at once dispelled. "You say that she is in the library?"

"Yes, sir."

"And she arrived?"

"Only a few minutes before you, sir."

The detective waited to ask no further questions, but made his way at once to the library. As he threw open the door and entered the room a woman who had been sitting in a far corner arose. She was heavily veiled, but, notwithstanding this fact, Nick Carter stopped short on the threshold. His eyes had penetrated the veil.

The woman who awaited him was the same who had sat facing him in the dining room of the Hotel Mammoth the night before—the woman he had catalogued as Mrs. Franz Dannenhauer, through whose rooms the body of the murdered man in ten-ninety had been removed!

The detective recovered instantly from his first shock of surprise, and, advancing quietly into the room, paused in front of his visitor.

"You wished to see me, madam?"

"You are Mr. Nicholas Carter?" the woman asked, with just a trace of foreign inflection, so slight, however, that it would have been impossible to have guessed her nationality. That she was in an extremely nervous state was at once noticeable.

"I am," replied Nick quietly. "Pray resume your seat," and he indicated, with a wave of his hand, the chair from which she had hastily risen when he entered the room.

With a little gasping sigh, the woman sank back into the chair, and the detective seated himself at his desk, half a dozen feet from his caller.

"How can I serve you, madam?" he asked, after a moment of tense silence.

"I hardly know how to tell you," replied the woman, her hands tightly clasped in her lap. Then, as she spoke, she made an involuntary gesture to raise her veil, but evidently thought better of this natural inclination. Her hands paused as they reached her chin, and dropped again into her lap.

"At least I may know whom I have the honor of addressing?" said Nick, with a smile.

"Yes, yes," replied the woman quickly. "I do not wish to make any mystery of myself. I am Mrs. Franz Dannenhauer."

"Yes?"

"I—I am in great trouble, sir, and have been told that possibly you might help me."

"Yes? And pray who recommended me as a trouble destroyer?" asked Nick, smiling slightly.

"Why—er—no one in this specific case, sir. I—I have heard of you, sir, and your great successes."

"Ah, yes. That is very flattering, I am sure."

Nick had decided to be entirely noncommittal—to let the woman play her own hand.

"I—I wish you to find a missing man."

The woman found nothing helpful in the detective's cold, piercing gaze, or his quiet, questioning manner.

"It—it is my husband."

"Yes?"

An expression of resentment flashed into the woman's eyes for a fleeting moment, and then she said:

"You make it very hard for me, sir."

"Indeed," said Nick, slightly raising his eyebrows; "in what way, madam? I am patiently awaiting your story."

"But—but what can I tell you?"

"Madam, if you have come here for the purpose of having me find your husband, you must tell me all the details of his disappearance; otherwise I fail to see how I can help you."

"I—I——"

"Stop!"

Nick spoke sharply and decisively, and as he did so he drew toward him a pile of afternoon newspapers that Joseph had placed upon his desk, as was his custom. Opening the first one that came to hand, the detective hastily scanned its columns.

"This paragraph had nothing to do with your visit, then?" he said, after a moment, as he handed the paper to the woman with his finger indicating the story of the finding of the body in the Sound, which he had caused to be sent from Bridgeport.

The woman reached forward eagerly for the paper, which Nick held outstretched to her, while, with the other hand, she threw back her veil, evidently the better to read the item to which he had called her attention.

The detective watched her face closely while she read the story. If he had expected to see her dissemble—to simulate grief, surprise, dismay, he was disappointed, for it was a real horror that shone in her eyes; a real shock, heart-deep, that caused her to gasp for breath as the paper fell from her nerveless hand to the floor.

"Heavens!" she cried, her eyes staring wildly into those of the detective; "the blow has fallen! Yomen has reached us here! Poor Franz! This is what our love has brought you to—death, at the hands of a cowardly assassin!"

CHAPTER VII.

NICK IS PUZZLED.

The woman's grief and horror were so evidently sincere that Nick, for a moment, was completely taken off his guard. He had expected an outbreak on her part, but one carefully studied—this was real.

It seemed as if she would faint, and Nick half rose from his chair to go to her assistance. But she recovered herself quickly, and, although she trembled visibly, the light of grief and pain in her eyes was burned out by a flash of fierce passion.

There was a short period of deathlike silence. The detective, his theories tumbling around him like a house of cards, studied his caller with undisguised interest; while her flashing eyes met his unflinchingly, seeming to pierce his very soul.

"Why did you suppose that that published article had brought me to you?" she demanded finally, in a cold, tense voice. "What do you know about the murder of that man?"

Nick Carter, once more in complete control of himself, smiled as the woman placed him upon the witness stand.

"Before I answer that question, Mrs. Dannenhauer, will you kindly tell me in what way you believed I could be of service to you?"

For a moment the woman hesitated, and then, as if having decided that the truth would serve her best, she said:

"I wanted you to find Franz Dannenhauer. I wanted you to save him from the fate he has met at the hands of his implacable enemies. I wanted to prevent this cruel murder. Is it not plain enough what I wanted you to do?"

The woman arose from her chair in her excitement and once more the expression of awful horror and grief supplanted that of fierce anger in her eyes.

Nick quietly waved her back to her chair, into which she sank, with a stifled gasp.

"Pray be calm, madam," he said. "As you see by the newspaper article, the dead man has not yet been identified."

"His identification is complete, so far as I am concerned. The man whose body you picked up in the Sound was Franz Dannenhauer."

"Why are you so confident of that?" asked the detective, watching the woman's face intently as he waited for her answer—for he had to wait as she seemed confused by his question.

After a moment she appeared to regain control of herself, and, raising her eyes to Nick's face with an assumption of calmness that he knew she did not feel, she said:

"Do you not think it is about time you answered my question? What do you know about the murder of that man?"

"Absolutely nothing," said the detective promptly.

"Then why should you have thought that that article printed in the afternoon newspapers should have brought me to you?"

The detective leaned a little forward in his chair, and met the woman's eyes with his penetrating glance, as he replied quickly:

"Now, madam, we are reaching a common ground. I will be entirely frank with you. I knew that you were in some way interested in the man whose body I picked up in the Sound."

"But how?" asked the woman, honest amazement showing in her eyes. "I told you nothing."

"I saw you dining in the public dining room of the Mammoth last evening," replied the detective, closely watching his caller as he spoke.

But there was no guilty start, no confusion in her manner, as she asked, in apparent surprise:

"Yes, and what of that? Many others were dining there, also."

Nick was puzzled, but he pressed his point further without pause.

"This man you call Franz Dannenhauer was lying dead in room number ten-ninety at that time," he continued.

The woman's eyes flashed again with fierce passion, and she gripped the arms of her chair as if to keep herself from springing to her feet.

"Ah, so it was there that he was slain?" she gasped.

"Yes," Nick persisted doggedly. "He was dead when your lips framed the words, 'I, too, can kill!'"

If he had expected that this shot would tell, Nick was mistaken, for even a slight smile flitted over the woman's haggard face as she said:

"You are an excellent detective, sir. I did not see you near us."

"That is not strange, madam. I was not near you, but while you sat at that table the dead body of Franz Dannenhauer was removed from the room in which he was slain to your apartments——"

"My apartments!" The woman interrupted quickly, her eyes wide with an unfeigned astonishment that once more puzzled the detective.

Nick nodded.

"So I have been told, madam," he said noncommittally, and quickly continued:

"And from there the murdered man was taken in a large trunk that was supposed to be the property of your maid. Can you tell me where that trunk was taken?"

For a moment there was a deep silence. The woman, who within the last half hour had been swayed by so many varying emotions, sat staring at the detective with a new horror in her eyes.

"Heavens!" she gasped, almost in a whisper. "Do you mean that you believe that I had anything to do with this awful crime?"

"I am simply reciting facts," said Nick coldly. "Is it your wish to tell me in what manner you have reached the conclusion that the body of the man found in the Sound is that of the man you call Franz Dannenhauer?"

Again there was a silence, while the woman seemed to struggle to regain her self-control, and when she finally answered the detective's question her voice was once more without a tremor as she replied:

"I cannot tell you that."

"You mean that you will not tell me—is that not true? Is it not a fact that you are entirely familiar with the letters that were found on the body of the dead man? Is it not a fact that you wrote them? That you are the Zora that signed them?"

"It would be foolish of me to deny it, but, believe me, sir, I cannot discuss these matters with you."

"This Franz Dannenhauer? He was—er—your brother?" asked the detective, apparently ignoring her reply.

"No; he was my husband, sir."

"Ah," said Nick, now rising slowly from his chair. "Then I sympathize deeply with you, madam, and regret that I could not have been of service to you."

The detective's tone was cold, and his manner that of dismissal.

"Ah, but you can be still, sir," said the woman, in a pleading tone. "I beg that you will bear with me."

"You have told me that you sought me to prevent the murder of Franz Dannenhauer. Admitting that the body that I found in the Sound was that of your husband, it is now too late. I fail to see how I can be of any service to you."

The light of passion again flashed in the woman's eyes, and she rose quickly to her feet, and advanced to the desk until she stood directly in front of the detective. Then she raised her right hand solemnly in the air, and said, in a hissing whisper:

"It is too late to prevent the crime, but not too late to avenge it!"

A slight smile crept about the mouth of the detective as he replied:

"Madam, I am not a thug, to be hired as the instrument of vengeance."

"But you represent the law."

"The law punishes, it does not avenge."

"Call it what you will. Murder has been done. The murderer must be found."

"I believe that the police authorities are entirely competent, madam."

"But you are a dtective—one who does not wait for the slow machinery of the law to punish crime, I am told."

"That is quite true, madam."

"Then why will you not aid me, sir?"

"Because you are not frank with me; because——"

"Ah, but I will be in so far as I can. What would you have me do?"

"I would like to have you answer me a few questions."

"I will do so, sir."

For a moment Nick paused, as if framing his catechism. Then suddenly he said:

"You base your identification of the body entirely on that newspaper article?"

The woman nodded.

"And yet there is absolutely no description of the body."

Again the woman nodded, without speaking.

"Then it is reasonable to assume that your identification is made through the letters that were found on the body?"

"Yes."

"Then, as there is no part of the letters quoted, you, of course, must depend on the one word—Yomen—which is quoted from one of the letters."

"I have already admitted to you that I wrote that letter."

"True, but there were two letters."

"I know of no other."

Nick took out his pocketbook, and slowly withdrew from it the shorter of the two letters found on the body of the dead man. This he carefully unfolded, and, pushing it across the table until it lay in front of his visitor, said:

"Do you recognize that handwriting?"

The woman leaned forward eagerly, and Nick, who was watching her closely, saw an expression of utter amazement creep into her eyes.

"That is seemingly in my handwriting," she said finally, "but I never wrote those words."

"Do you know who did?"

"No."

"Pardon me just a moment."

As he spoke, the detective opened a drawer in the desk, and took out a large magnifying glass. Then, passing around to the woman's side, he handed it to her, saying at the same time:

"Will you favor me by looking more closely at the writing?"

She took the glass without a word, and leaned over the desk until she brought the writing into proper focus.

As she did so, the detective twisted around his finger a stray thread of hair that had escaped from beneath her hat.

The next instant the woman uttered a little cry, and put her hand quickly to her head.

Nick was calmly looking over her shoulder at the note which she had been examining.

CHAPTER VIII.

INTO A TRAP.

When Nick left him, Chick at once turned down Main Street in the direction of the theatrical costumer's, where both the detectives were well known. The store was only a few blocks distant, and Chick, noticing that no car was in sight, turned and started to walk. As he did so, a man stepped out of a near-by doorway, and, mingling with the passing pedestrians, followed closely in the wake of the unsuspecting Chick.

He was a small, dark man, roughly dressed, as might

befit a laborer. He was, however, inconspicuous in the hurrying crowds, and, moving with a step that was catlike in its swiftness and covert stealth, he wove his way along, always keeping the detective well in view. There was no occasion for any concealment, for Chick was absolutely without suspicion that he was being followed; but the man moved like one whose natural instincts were those of concealment.

When Chick reached the costumer's, which was on the second floor of a business building, he entered the narrow hallway that led to the floor above, and, as he did so, his shadow darted into a doorway on the opposite side of the street.

"As I live! the villagers approach," cried a fat man who stood behind a counter, as Chick swung open the door of the shop, and advanced with a smile. "To what dark crime am I indebted for this unexpected, but very welcome, visit?"

"Why do you associate me with crime, Jameson?" asked Chick, smiling as he grasped the outstretched hand of the costumer.

Jameson had been an actor before he went into the business of costumer, and he still retained many of the mannerisms that mark the melodramatic thespian.

"My dear Chick," he declared, as he came quickly around from behind the counter, "'tis not alone your inky cloak, but I know your game, my lad, an' 'tis one that brings you to me in the shadow of evil. I take it that thou wouldst not trip the light fantastic in the festive raiment of a gay cavalier; thou wouldst not seek the cloak and sword of the 'steenth century, in which to disport thyself in the gay maze of the dance; in fact, thou seekest me not in the staid lines of my art, but rather I may so bedeck and bedizen you that your own mother would not call you Chick nor child—rather good, eh, for one who is somewhat out of practice? Now, what can I do for you in the interest of law and order, my boy?"

"Well, Jameson," said Chick, laughing, "if you can descend to earth for a moment I would like to get a simple disguise. If you will let me dig around in the other room I can fix myself out in short order."

"Go as far as you like, my boy," said Jameson, pointing to a door at the end of the room. "There's the stuff to fix you up from a Bluebeard to a Captain Kidd. It's yours to command."

Fifteen minutes later, when Chick came out of the dressing room, he had assumed an effective but simple disguise. He wore a black beard and spectacles, and a slouch hat. A touch or two of grease paint had added twenty years to his age. Otherwise he had made no change in his appearance, but this was quite sufficient to call forth a word of commendation from the costumer.

"Very clever, Chick," he said, as he surveyed the detective with a critical eye. "You and Nick are the slickest in the business in that line. And now where are you headed for, my lad? Better leave your call. You know that I do not want to butt into your business, but I guess you can recall several instances where a quiet tip to yours truly, James Jameson, has saved both you and Nick some trouble when your game has turned on you."

"Right you are, Jim," said Chick heartily. "I appreciate that, but this time I am working strictly under Nick's orders; and, besides, the quarry isn't wise. It's the morgue for mine."

"Huh! Playin' solitaire with a dead one, eh?"

Could Chick have seen the shadow dart out of the doorway on the opposite side of the street and take up his trail again as soon as he left the costumer's, and as readily as if he had worn no disguise, he would not have felt so confident that the quarry was "not wise."

But neither Nick nor Chick had regarded caution necessary until Chick should take up his vigil at the morgue. The escape and disappearance of the little brown man whom Nick had knocked back into the water had given the detective very little concern, as he had figured that the man had succeeded in making his way back to the boat that had brought him and his companion, with their gruesome burden, out on the waters of the Sound, and that he had then made good his escape under cover of the heavy fog.

But in this he was mistaken, for a low-lying motor boat had kept the detective's yacht in sight, even during the night that she lay on the rocks, and, while practically hull down to the yacht, had managed to trail it into the harbor of Bridgeport without being discovered.

And so Chick, ignorant of the fact that a persistent shadow was on his trail, made his way to the morgue.

Jeremiah O'Connell, the morgue keeper, was an old friend of both Nick and Chick, but he looked up at the young detective as he entered the office without a sign of recognition.

"Is this the morgue?" asked Chick gravely.

"Sure, an' ye wouldn't be afther takin' it for a dance hall, now, would yez?" replied O'Connell, whose naturally genial disposition had been somewhat warped by his occupation.

"No, my friend," replied Chick, with a twinkle in his eyes; "but what is not a dance hall is not necessarily a morgue; nor what is not a morgue to be certainly classed a dance hall. Therefore, I am at a loss to understand your point. Is it not true? Yes?"

O'Connell whirled around in his swivel chair and stared up at his visitor in amazement. Then slowly a smile broke over his rugged face, as he said under his breath:

"Chick, ye divil, ye! Sure, an' I never would have known ye but fer the grin in yer eyes. Phat's up, an' phat is it brings ye to Bridgeport?"

"You have got a body here, Jerry, that was brought in early to-day, haven't you?"

"Wan that was kapin' a date in the Sound, is it?"

"That's the one, Jerry."

"Sure, the gintleman is here, sor."

"Has any one been here to look at the body—to try to identify it?"

"Nary a soul, sor. It's been a bit av an off day, Chick. Sure, I have only two lodgers in the place."

"It is possible that some one may call at any time now. In that case, Jerry, I want you to help me."

"Sure, an' ye well know that I'll do that same. But are ye wise to the bit av a slash the gint's got between the shoulders?"

"Yes, Jerry; Nick and I brought the body in."

"I see, sor. Baitin' the trap, eh? Phat can I do fer ye?"

"I want to stay in the office here, out of sight, and if any one calls to see the body, I want you to let me know at once. I will take care of the rest."

"Sure, an' that's aisy, Chick."

But, notwithstanding that Nick was confident that some one would call at the morgue to identify the body, sev-

eral hours passed without so much as a single visitor. Still, Chick, who never questioned the chief's orders, stuck doggedly to his post. It was not until night had fallen that he decided to make a visit to police headquarters to see if any inquiry had been made there in regard to the body.

By this time Jerry's night relief had arrived, and, being a man whom the morgue keeper said could be fully trusted, the matter was explained to him, with instructions to detain any possible caller until Chick's return.

"I'll walk a block or two with ye, Chick," said Jerry, lighting his pipe. "It's on me way home."

As they left the gloomy building, and passed out on the dark street, a shadowy figure, unnoticed by either, darted ahead of them, keeping close within the deep shadows of the buildings.

Chick stopped to light a cigar, and then they started up the dimly lighted side street in the direction of a brilliantly illuminated thoroughfare two blocks distant.

As they did so, a large limousine whirled into the street a block beyond them, and when nearly abreast of them swung up to the curb and came to a sudden stop.

The door of the car flew open and a woman, heavily veiled, sprang out and rapidly approached the two men.

"Oh, sir!" she cried, appealing directly to Chick, "my brother has been taken suddenly ill. Will you please see what you can do for him?"

As she spoke, she placed her hand on Chick's arm and drew him toward the car. Chick, ever ready to respond to the call of a woman in distress, did not need any urging, and rapidly approached the waiting car, while Jerry, puffing excitedly at his pipe, followed a few paces in the rear.

The door of the car had been left open, and as Chick approached it the woman stood to one side, at the same time indicating with a wave of her hand the dark interior of the limousine.

Chick thrust his head in at the door, and as he did so a heavy blow fell, and he crumpled up on the steps of the automobile.

Like a flash two arms shot out of the car, and the next moment the inanimate body of the detective was dragged inside the automobile, the woman following quickly.

It all transpired so rapidly that O'Connell was unable to interfere. He saw Chick sink down, unconscious, and he knew in a moment that something was wrong. To think was to act with Jerry, and he sprang like a cat to the assistance of the young detective. But even as he did so, a shadow sprang up behind him, some sort of a weapon rose and fell, and Jeremiah O'Connell sank down on the sidewalk, his mind enveloped in darkness.

The next moment the little man who had struck the blow leaped into the limousine, the door was slammed, and the car sped off into the night.

CHAPTER IX.

A MYSTERIOUS COUNTRY.

"The handwriting is not familiar to you?" asked Nick quietly, as he leaned over the woman.

"Except that I know it is not, I should say it was mine," she replied, in a puzzled tone, her hand still straying nervously among her golden locks.

"Then you never wrote those words?"

"Never! They are incomprehensible to me."

"Will you pardon me a moment?"

As Nick spoke, he turned to a small, flat-topped desk in a corner of the room, and quickly switched on a light above it. Without waiting for the woman to reply, he seated himself, with his back turned to her, and unwrapped from his forefinger a long thread of golden hair. Placing this with extreme care on the desk, he took from his pocketbook that other thread of golden hair that he had untwisted from the button of the coat of the dead man. Laying them side by side on a piece of black manifolding paper, he took from a drawer of the desk another magnifying glass of great power.

For a moment he examined the two golden hairs closely, then, when he finally raised his head, there was an expression of puzzled thought in his eyes, but the cold, almost pitiless gleam was no longer there. Folding the two strands carefully in a piece of writing paper, he placed them in his pocketbook, and then swung around in his chair, again facing his visitor.

While the detective had been occupied at the small desk, the woman had sat with her hands folded in her lap, and her eyes, big with some secret emotion, fixed with an expressionless stare upon the wall directly in front of her. When the detective swung around in his chair, she turned her head slightly, and her eyes met his with a look of anxious pleading. She did not speak, seeming to be content to wait for some word from Nick.

And the detective, for a moment, seemed equally reluctant to speak. Finally he drew a chair up directly in front of her, and, seating himself with his elbows on the arms and his hands clasped in front of him, he said, in a calm, even tone:

"Madam, you have told me that you came to me to help you find Franz Dannenhauer."

The woman nodded, without a word.

"Then you tell me that the body that I picked up in Long Island Sound is that of this man Dannenhauer. Therefore he is found."

Again the woman nodded, clasping and unclasping her fingers as her hands lay trembling in her lap.

"And now you plead for vengeance."

At these words she rose from her chair, and her eyes again flashed with a light of deadly passion.

"Vengeance!" she cried. "Aye, vengeance for my dead!"

"And I have told you that I am not the instrument of vengeance, but"—here the detective leaned forward in his chair, his cold, calm gaze fixed on the passion-lighted eyes of the woman—"I will find the murderer of Franz Dannenhauer if I can count on your aid!"

Again the light of anger faded, and again that hunted look of fear flashed into her eyes.

"But how can I help you?" she cried.

"You can help me by answering just six questions—frankly. Will you do so?"

The woman seemed to hesitate, and then she sank back in her chair, with a sobbing sigh, and then said, almost in a whisper:

"Ask them. I will try."

"Who was the man with whom you were dining at the Hotel Mammoth?"

"A—a friend."

"That is not an answer. Pray go on."

"He is known as Prince Thamen——"

"Ah, of the royal house, then?"

The woman started, and went deadly pale.

"What do you know of the royal house?" she asked, in an awed whisper.

"Surely a prince is of the royal line, is he not?" replied Nick lightly, though his eyes were fixed upon those of his visitor with a glance as penetrating as cold steel. "Pardon my interruption. Pray continue."

"But there is no more to—to tell."

"Exactly. He is Prince Thamen, of—of Nowhere, eh? Very well, we will dismiss Thamen. When did you engage your rooms at the Mammoth, Mrs. Dannenhauer?"

"I—at the Mammoth? I never had any rooms at the Mammoth, sir," replied the woman quickly. "I was simply dining there with the prince."

"And you are stopping—where?"

"At the Cordelia."

Nick showed no surprise at her answer, and quickly continued:

"Do you know, or have you any suspicion of the man—perhaps I should say person—who killed Franz Dannenhauer?"

The woman's eyes narrowed, but she met the detective's gaze calmly, as she replied:

"Had I that knowledge, or even suspicion, should I have sought your aid?"

For a moment Nick did not reply. His brow contracted slightly, as if he were thinking deeply. Then he said:

"Madam, your equivocation is childish. It is an insult to my intelligence. Under the circumstances it is impossible for me to aid you. But, before you go let me present to you one of your friends."

Nick rose from his chair and touched a button beneath his desk. In a moment his young assistant, Patsy, entered the room.

"Want anything, chief?" asked Patsy.

"Yes, Patsy; bring down our latest boarder."

With a nod of understanding, Patsy left the room. The woman, her expression one of wonderment and fear, rose quickly from her chair, and started for the door.

"Pardon me for having intruded my affairs upon you," she said nervously. "It is evident that you cannot help me. I will go."

"Just one moment," said the detective, placing himself between the woman and the door. "It is my wish that you should meet this gentleman."

As he spoke, Patsy opened the door of the library, and with a none too gentle push sent the little brown man who accompanied him into the middle of the room.

The sharp eyes of the prisoner had spied the woman, even as he was sent whirling across the threshold, and, bringing himself up sharply, he sank on his knees before her, and bowed his head until it rested on the rug at her feet.

"Heavens! Gasgar! How came you here?"

It was the woman who spoke, her voice a shrill shriek, and she rose from her chair, and would have fallen had not Nick, who had been watching her closely, sprang to her side and supported her. As he did so he made a slight sign to Patsy, who quickly dragged the kneeling man to his feet, and hustled him from the room as unceremoniously as he had thrust him into it.

Gently the detective placed the woman again in the chair, and seated himself once more opposite her, his elbows resting on the arms of the chair, his hands clasped in front of him, and his eyes fixed on her face with that cold, impassive, penetrating gaze that seemed to reach to the very soul.

Presently her eyes met his, and they were filled with an expression in which fear, wonder, and interrogation were strangely mingled.

Nick was first to break the silence.

"Are you convinced, madam, that it is useless to try to deceive me in this matter?" he asked.

She nodded helplessly, without a word.

"Then, if you will give me your attention for a few minutes, I would like to tell you a little story in which I believe you will be interested. Do you care to hear it?"

The woman nodded again.

"First, let me tell you what I know about a certain mysterious country that is supposed to lie back of the great wilderness of Yucatan. I say mysterious, because several expeditions have endeavored to explore the region, and not one of them has returned. This is a matter of history, and that is as far as history goes. But if one were to piece together the romantic fragments of stories that have been told by the Indian runners who reach the coast every year, and who are believed to penetrate this mysterious region, there lies beyond the wilderness a most remarkable country, rich beyond compare in its natural wealth, and in the knowledge of centuries. Do I interest you, madam?"

Nick paused as he asked the question, and looked sharply at the woman, who was now gazing at him with wide-open eyes from which all expression, except startled amazement, had fled.

"How do you know this?" she whispered wonderingly.

"I know it, because a scientist—a very dear friend of mine—passed many years of his life in Yucatan, where he was known simply as a trader, and the unpublished records of his years of research are now in my possession. Shall I go on?"

"But what has this to do with the murder of Franz Dannenhauer?"

"Madam, I fancy that you are a better judge of that than I. Shall I continue?"

Nick could see that the woman, startled by his words, was still anxious to learn more of what he knew.

"I cannot conceive that this romantic tale can have any bearing on the crime that I wish you to investigate," she said nervously, but with a slight flush of embarrassment; "but I pray you will go on, if you think it will be of any assistance."

"It will be of undoubted assistance if it will cause you to tell me all of the details of the case which you bring to me, and ask me to investigate so blindly."

Again the woman simply nodded in acquiescence.

"Very well," continued Nick, "in this far-away, mysterious country there is a monarchy as old as the hills—half savage, half civilized. Half savage, because they still worship their own gods; half civilized, because they are being more or less influenced by the outer world."

The woman sat with her hands at her breast, her breath coming in little gasps, and her eyes fixed on the stern face of the detective with an expression indicating the excess of wonderment.

"Am I right?" asked Nick quietly, after a moment's pause.

"Yes," whispered the woman, "and I will tell you all."

"Now, this is where we get some action," said Nick, smiling.

There was another short pause, during which the woman seemed to be collecting her wits. Then she said quickly:

"I do not know where you gained your knowledge of my country, but it cannot be said that what you have so far told me is not true. I will not attempt to deny it. And, so long as you know so much, I will, as I have said, tell you all, although I violate an oath of my country and my gods by so doing."

"I do not think your country or your gods will suffer, madam," interjected Nick, "particularly if you wish me to help you in the matter of the tragedy at the Mammoth."

"Listen!" said the woman. "My country is as old as the world. We have a god whom we worship as you worship yours. Our people are ignorant of everything in the way of religion, except what has been handed down to them through generations and generations. When I say our people, I mean those who have never known anything of the world beyond the confines of our land. With the royal house it is different. The nobles, or those in any way connected with the throne, are sent out into the world at a certain age, but not until they have proven their allegiance to Yomen, and have sworn a solemn oath to return to their own country. We go into the world. We visit all your great countries. We are educated in your academies. We study all your great achievements, and we go back with the knowledge of all that your world can give us. We have aëroplanes, automobiles, wireless telegraphy—everything that your so-called civilization can give you. But all must be operated within the prescribed limits of our ancient realm. Oh, sir, there is where the struggle comes!"

"I can imagine so, after one has been out into the greater world," said Nick earnestly.

"Well, it happened that I was the last to leave the court for the broader education. I went to Germany, and there I met Franz Dannenhauer. We were mutually attracted. I told him the story of my life and my country, and he induced me to marry him, telling me that under his name I need have no fear of being forced to return to what I had come to regard as serfdom.

"We were married, and I returned to New York, where I was to meet Prince Thamen, my cousin, with whom I was to return to my ancestral home. Franz was forced to remain for several days behind me, but we were to meet in New York. In the meantime I was to keep the appointment with Thamen, and to tell him that I should never return to my native country. I met him, and told him that I had married. He threatened to kill Franz—but he was already dead—and it was then, goaded by passion, I told him what you read from my lips—that I, too, could kill."

Nick did not speak for several minutes, but finally he said:

"Have you any close relatives in your own country who might be here at this time?"

"No, sir. I have told you that only one member of the royal house leaves it at one time."

"But there is Prince Thamen—what about him?"

"He alone comes and goes as he pleases."

"Is it not possible that he followed you out into the greater world?"

"Yes, it is possible."

"He would not come alone?"

"No; he would probably have several of his attendants with him."

"And besides those attendants is there any other person who might have a reason for accompanying him here?"

The detective looked at the woman closely, and for a long time she sat thinking deeply. Finally she raised her eyes as if she had reached a decision. Then she said slowly:

"Yes, there was a person who might have left the country with him, but I cannot see how she could have passed the barriers."

"She? And who might she be?"

Again there was a long pause.

"Have I got to tell you this, sir?" the woman asked finally.

"I think you had better," said Nick, who believed that she was now in a mood to tell the whole story.

"She is my sister, Princess Tanza."

"Hum. I am now going to ask you a very personal question, princess. You may answer it, or not, as you please. Is Prince Thamen in love with you?"

"He has professed to be," replied the woman, her face flushing.

"And why should your sister, Princess Tanza, accompany the prince here?"

"I am sure I cannot tell you that."

"Then I can," said Nick earnestly, rising from his chair and leaning across the table. "She is a jealous woman. Tell me—remember we must have the truth—is she not in love with the prince?"

"Yes, yes, she is bitterly jealous, but what could have been her motive in accompanying him?"

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"It is difficult to analyze the motives of a jealous woman," he said. "She might have wished to be with him, but it is probable that she wished to prevent you from being too much alone with him."

"It is not like her."

"It is like a woman. Does your sister resemble you?"

"Only in features, sir. I am dark, with blond hair. She is a perfect brunette."

"I see," said the detective, and the flash of a smile passed over his face. "I think, Mrs. Dannenhauer, if you will return to your hotel, I may have something to report to you there to-night."

"As soon as that?"

"I hope so. I have not much time to remain in the city."

CHAPTER X.

INTO THE TRAP.

When his caller had departed, Nick turned at once to his desk telephone.

"This is Nick Carter, central," he said, as soon as the connection was established. "Yes, the detective. Will you kindly give me Bridgeport police headquarters direct? Thank you."

While he waited, Nick pressed a button under his desk, and in a moment Patsy responded.

"Want me, chief?" asked Patsy, as he entered the room.

"Yes. The prisoner is all right?"

"Safe as a trivet, Nick."

"I fear that something has gone wrong with Chick."

"What's the matter, chief? Chick doesn't usually slip a cog."

"No; but I should have heard from him before this. Ah, here is Bridgeport. Wait a minute, Patsy."

Nick turned to the telephone, which was ringing loudly.

"Yes, this is Nick Carter," he said. "Ah, it's you, Sergeant Bailey. Good! My assistant, Chick, is in Bridgeport on business. Have you heard anything from him? What's that? Just going to telephone to me? Why——"

There was a deep silence in the room while the detective listened to the voice at the other end of the wire, and Patsy, who knew his chief's moods like a book, could see by his flashing eyes that the news from Bridgeport had disturbed him.

Finally he hung up the receiver and turned to his assistant.

"Something wrong, chief?" asked Patsy quickly.

"Yes; Chick has slipped a cog this time, but it is not strange. We simply underestimated the enemy."

"Well, you know, chief, I haven't been in on this game, so it is all Dutch to me."

"Listen, Patsy. I will make it short, for we haven't any time to lose."

Nick then told his assistant what had transpired since the occurrence of the evening before at the Mammoth.

"I'm on, chief," said Patsy quickly, when the detective had finished. "Chick is in trouble in Bridgeport, eh?"

"Not in Bridgeport now, Patsy, I fear. Bailey tells me that O'Connell is at police headquarters with a broken head. It seems that he and Chick had left the morgue for police headquarters, when Chick was attacked by a party in an automobile, and dragged into the car. O'Connell was struck down from behind, and that is all he knows. He at once made his way to headquarters, very sensibly, and made his report there."

"Gee! but that South American dago is a pippin, Nick. What about the machine?"

"A local car. The sergeant traced that."

"Then we cannot get a line on it."

"Bailey learned that it was chartered for an indefinite time by a man who looked like a foreigner, and who would not take a chauffeur."

"How in blazes came they to let him have the car, then, Nick?"

"Easy enough. He put up the cost of the machine in cold cash."

"Say, Nick, the prince is a rapid player."

"Apparently a foeman worthy of our steel, Patsy. And now to work."

"Yes, it's our move, but I don't just see what it will be. There is nothing to show whether that car headed for Canada or California."

"Yes, there is. Bailey at once set the police wires to work. The car was last reported to him as passing through Westchester village, but too late to stop it."

"Well, and what is our move?"

For a moment the detective was silent, then he said quietly:

"I think, Patsy, we will wait for our next caller, before we take any action."

"Our next caller, chief?" asked Patsy, in surprise.

"Yes, Prince Thamen."

The doorbell rang violently at this moment.

"Ah, there he is, now," said the detective.

The next moment there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" called Nick, and Joseph softly opened the door and stood waiting on the threshold.

"Well?" said Nick.

"A man who says he is Mr. Thamen wishes to see you, sir."

"Very well, Joseph. The reception room. I will be down in a moment."

Patsy, whose admiration for Nick Carter's wonderful powers of intuition was always being stirred, gazed at his chief in wonder.

"And now, Patsy, where is the inspector?"

"Gone to headquarters. Said he would stay there until he heard from you, sir."

"Very good. Wait for me here, Patsy."

Nick rose and passed out of the room. As he entered the reception room on the floor below, he was confronted by a small, dark man, who had been nervously pacing the floor. He was dressed in the latest fashion, but wore a turnover collar and a flowing silk bow tie. One would have taken him for an art student from the Latin Quarter.

"This is Nick Carter, the detective?" he asked, coming to a stop in front of Nick, who had paused as soon as he entered the room.

"Yes, I am Nick Carter; please be seated, sir."

"Thank you. I shall not detain you long. I read a paragraph in the early editions of the evening papers that has an unusual interest for me. As yours was the only name mentioned, I have come to you for information."

"As my name was mentioned only once in to-day's news," replied Nick gravely, "I presume that you refer to the article telling of the finding of a body in the Sound."

"Yes, yes, that is it."

Nick nodded, without speaking.

"The article speaks of some letters that were found on the body. You have these in your possession, sir?"

Nick nodded again.

"You will let me see them, sir? The article speaks of them as undecipherable."

"You realize, of course, that I represent the police?"

"Why—er—yes, sir. I know that you are spoken of as a detective."

"And that the man whose body I picked up in the Sound had been murdered?"

"I—er—the article said that the man had died of a stab wound, yes."

"A stab wound in the back means murder. The man could not have struck the blow himself, eh?"

"Well, no, hardly."

Nick's visitor was finding his mission more difficult than he had anticipated.

"And does it not occur to you that your interest in the matter might be misinterpreted by the police—I represent the police, as you have said—and might arouse some suspicion, unless you made your position quite clear?"

"I—er—I don't think I quite understand?"

"Well, I will make it a little plainer, then: What is your interest in this dead man?"

"Oh, I see. Why, that is simple enough. I fear that the body may be that of a friend of mine. I thought perhaps the letters might clear up that point."

"Is your friend missing?"

"I believe so. I——"

"Just one moment."

Nick rose from his chair, as if a sudden thought had occurred to him.

"Pray pardon me. I had forgotten some instructions to my man. I will return in a few moments."

Without evening waiting for the assent of his visitor, Nick quickly left the room.

It was five minutes before he returned. When he did so he closed the door and stood with his back against it.

"Now, prince," he said sharply, "there is no use in our bandying useless words."

The little man sprang to his feet.

"You know me?" he cried, in amazement.

Nick nodded gravely.

"Yes, I know you, Prince Thamen. And, furthermore, prince, I am perfectly willing to give you the knowledge that you came here to seek. You might have saved yourself trouble by telling me the truth. Unless you have any more fairy tales to tell me, you are at liberty to take your servant and go!"

As Nick finished speaking, he pressed a button in the molding of the door, and stepped aside.

A moment later the door was opened violently, the little black man was again thrust into the room, while Joseph stood imperturbable on the threshold.

"You may go, Joseph," said Nick quietly, as the prisoner rushed to the prince and fell at his feet.

Thamen, in utter consternation, looked wildly at the detective.

"I have called a taxicab, prince," continued Nick, a slight smile playing around his mouth. "I thought you would not care to take your man out in that costume, or, rather, lack of costume. Ah, here it is, now. Glad to have been of some service to you, prince."

As he spoke, the detective threw open the door, and stood quietly in an attitude of dismissal.

Prince Thamen, completely disconcerted, and plainly unable to cope with the situation, touched the kneeling man on the shoulder, and walked quickly to the door, followed by the cringing figure of his almost naked servitor. At the threshold he seemed to somewhat recover himself, and he turned to the detective, bowing low.

"I thank you, Mr. Carter, for your kindness," he said, with grave courtesy. "I hope we shall meet again."

"I think we shall, prince, and soon," thought Nick, but he did not speak as he bowed his visitor out.

In the hall, Joseph stood with the outside door held open, and Prince Thamen and his follower darted quickly down the steps. The prince paused a moment to give the chauffeur some whispered instructions, and then leaped into the taxicab, and was quickly followed by his man.

As the taxicab was driven rapidly away toward Broadway, an automobile swung around the corner in its wake.

The moment that the taxicab and the automobile which followed it were out of sight, the detective hurried to his make-up room. Fifteen minutes later an apparently aged man with gray hair and whiskers stepped out.

Ten minutes later he walked briskly enough when the telephone bell rang, and it was a strong, deep voice that called:

"Is that you, Patsy? Yes, this is Nick. West Fifty-eighth Street, eh? Yes, I know the block. Hammond is the agent. He has an office in Ninth Avenue. Listen. Hold Danny and the automobile around the corner. See Hammond, or one of his clerks. Explain to him only what is necessary, and get an order for a prospective purchaser to inspect the house. I will be there inside of half an hour."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROUND-UP.

Patsy stood on the curb, leaning against the tonneau of Nick's automobile, when he felt a light touch on his shoulder.

"Jump in, young man," said a kindly voice, "I am sorry I kept you waiting so long. You had better give me the permit. I suppose you got it all right?"

"Mr Carter!" gasped Patsy. "Sure, your own mother would never know you!"

Then he climbed obediently into the car, and Nick quickly followed him, whispering a few words to Danny, who sat stolidly at the wheel.

The car was promptly started, and they swung around into Fifty-ninth Street, and pulled up in front of a small, brick house, one of a row.

During the brief drive, Patsy had managed to whisper to Nick:

"House hired from month to month, without lease, to a Mr. Thamen, who silences all questions as to references by paying six months in advance. Poses as a well-to-do Frenchman who is studying art for his health."

"All right, Patsy. You know the game."

"Sure thing, chief," replied the lad, as he jumped from the car, followed in a more leisurely and dignified manner by Nick.

Patsy ran up the short flight of steps ahead of his chief, and pressed the bell button. Nick quietly followed, scanning the house curiously, as might any prospective buyer; but at the same time his eyes took in every window with a penetrating glance in search of some sign of the occupants. He was not disappointed. In a second-story window, his eyes met those of Prince Thamen, who was evidently much interested in his unexpected callers.

In response to Patsy's ring, a young Irish girl opened the door.

"Is Mr. Thamen in?" asked Patsy briskly, at the same time slipping into the hall, and casually placing his foot against the door.

"Sure, and if it's the gintleman av the house ye are looking for, he's in, but I don't quite know his quare name yit. It's me first day."

"All right, my girl," said Nick, in a benevolent tone. "Please tell him that the representative of Mr. Hammond, the agent, is here with a gentleman who wishes to see the house, with a view to buying the property. "And be spry, please. I am in a hurry."

"Certainly, sir. Will yez step in?"

As both the detectives had already "stepped in," the invitation was somewhat superfluous. The girl closed the door, and, leaving the men standing in the hall, hurried upstairs.

Scarcely a moment elapsed before there was a light step on the stairs and Prince Thamen quickly descended. He stopped inquiringly at the foot and bowed politely to Nick.

"Will you kindly step into the reception room? Pray pardon the bareness. I have only rented the house, furnished, for a short time. The maid tells me that you come from the agent."

As he spoke, the prince led the way into a small room off the hall. When his visitors had entered he closed the door behind them and pointed to chairs.

Nick took the chair indicated, but Patsy remained stand-

ing near the prince, fumbling in his pocket for the order from the real-estate agent.

"And now, Mr. Carter, to what good fortune am I indebted for this visit, and why the disguise?"

A slight smile of satisfaction flashed over the dark face of the prince as he spoke. Nick, although astounded that his disguise had been so easily penetrated, was not taken off his guard.

"Quick, Patsy! Get him!"

There was a short, sharp struggle and then a click as handcuffs snapped on the wrists of the prince. Patsy was always ready for the unexpected, and delighted in quick action.

"Sit there, you dago," he snapped breathlessly, as he pushed the prince back into a chair.

"Frisk him, Patsy," said Nick quietly, and the detective quickly felt for any weapons that the prisoner might carry.

"Nothing doing, chief."

"Very well. And now, prince, would you mind telling me how you discovered my identity. I confess to a very strong curiosity."

"Quite easy, Mr. Carter. I noticed that little piece of court plaster on your thumb when I called. A small matter, I admit, but somehow it impressed me. Small matters do sometimes, you know."

"You command my admiration, prince," said Nick, and he was quite sincere.

"And, now," continued Thamen, still smiling, "may I inquire why, if I was to be put to this indignity, that it was not accomplished while I was in your house?"

"That, also, is quite easy, prince," replied Nick. "For several reasons I was anxious to take my bird in his nest. I do not admit that I would not have found the nest, anyway, but it might have taken time, and I never like to waste time. The simplest way was to let you lead me to it."

"Quite simple, truly."

"And, now, prince, with your kind permission I will take a look through the house. If I am not mistaken you have a friend of mine here as an unwilling guest."

"You hold the cards, as you Americans say, Mr. Carter," replied the prince calmly.

"Remain here with our friend, Patsy," said Nick shortly, as he turned and left the room.

In the hall he met the maid suspiciously near the door. She started for the basement stairs as he closed the door of the reception room.

"Just a moment, please," said Nick quickly. "I wish to ask you a few questions."

"An' who made you me boss?" demanded the girl flippantly.

"The law, my girl," said Nick, somewhat sternly. "I am an officer, and if you answer my questions truthfully and quickly it will be better for you."

"The law, is it?" gasped the girl. "Sure, an' it's a dacent girl I am, and I have nothing to fear from the law."

"That will depend upon how promptly and frankly you answer my questions. Now, who else besides the prince occupies this house?"

"The prince, is it?"

"I mean the man who employed you."

"Sure, an' it's only himself that I have seen, but I do be hearing quare noises the day."

"Where do these noises come from?"

"Seems like they come from the master's room, but I have heard thim when he was not in it himself."

"Very well—er—I don't know your name, my girl. Nora, I should say at a guess. All pretty Irish girls are named Nora."

"Sure, it's the divil ye are for guessing."

"Well, Nora, you will find it worth your while to follow my instructions closely."

"Sure, an' it's plazed I am to serve the law an' such a fine old gintleman like yourself."

"First, we will look into these noises, Nora. Show me your master's room."

"Sure, an' the dure is locked, sir. It's always locked."

"You have made good use of your time, Nora," said the detective, with a smile. "Never mind. Locks do not bother me."

At this moment a telephone bell rang somewhere above them.

"Where is the phone?" asked Nick quickly.

"At the ind av the hall, upstairs, sir."

Nick sprang up two steps at a time, while Nora watched him with staring eyes. She had never seen such a spry old man before.

Nick found the telephone in a second, and snatched the receiver from the hook.

"Well?" he called.

There was a short pause, and then he said:

"Yes, this is Thamen," and it was in the voice of the prince that he spoke. Nora, on the floor below, gasped for breath.

For a moment there was silence, and then Nick continued, still perfectly imitating the voice of the prince:

"Listen. In just half an hour from now there will be an automobile waiting at the southeast corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-eighth Street. It will be occupied by an elderly man who will seem to be waiting for some one. Walk directly up to the car, and say to the gentleman: 'I am Miss Martin.' Say nothing more nor less, or he will pay no attention to you. Then follow his instructions absolutely. No, it is not safe to come to the house. Very good. Now remember: 'I am Miss Martin.' Never mind who the man is. You can trust him as you would me. And remember this: It means disaster if you do not follow these instructions to the letter. Very good. Good-by."

There was a wide smile on Nick's face as he hung up the receiver, and returned to the head of the stairs.

"Come up, Nora, and show me to your master's room," he called.

The girl came quickly up the stairs, wonder and fright staring out of her eyes.

"The master's room, quick!" said Nick.

He spoke now in his natural voice, and the girl seemed almost paralyzed with fear.

"Is it the divil ye are?" she managed to gasp.

"Your master's room!" repeated Nick sharply, and, as he spoke a smothered groan came from the room directly at his right.

Without waiting for the girl to indicate the door, he stepped to it, and tried the knob. It would not yield. In a second Nick whipped out a skeleton key, thrust it into the keyhole, and turned the lock. In another moment he was inside the room.

"Chick," he cried, "are you all right?"

Chick lay on a couch bound hand and foot, and with a

gag in his mouth. He could not speak, but the smile in his eyes showed that he had recognized his chief.

Nick was at his side in a moment, and in as speedy a manner as possible he removed the gag from his mouth, and unfastened the ropes that bound him.

Then Nick stepped quickly to a washbowl in the room, and, pulling a clean towel from the rack, he drenched it in water, and handed it to the now panting Chick.

"Wash out your mouth," he said, "and then take a pull at this," and he handed his assistant a small flask which he always carried with him for medicinal purposes in emergencies.

"Now, if you can talk, Chick," he said, "tell me in as few words as possible what happened after they got you into the automobile."

"You know about that?" said Chick, speaking with some difficulty.

Nick nodded.

"There is not much to add, then, Nick. They got me good and plenty, and when I came to my senses I was here, bound and gagged."

"Whom have you seen?"

"No one but the two black chaps."

"Very well. Now I am going to let you take charge of the prince."

"You've got him, eh? Good."

"Yes; Patsy is entertaining him downstairs. He's game. I've got an engagement down the street. As soon as I am gone I wish you would telephone the inspector that we shall have some prisoners for him at my house in about an hour. And then I wish you would call a carriage and take the prince to the house, and wait until I arrive."

"What's up, Nick? I seem to have slipped out of this game pretty thoroughly. Serves me right, though, for letting that dago get the best of me in Bridgeport."

"I don't think that you need lament, Chick. Perhaps that little slip of yours brought things to a focus quicker than they would otherwise have shaped."

Nick smiled at the disturbed expression of his assistant's face, and turned to the door. Chick followed him, still a little weak in the legs.

In the reception room below they found Patsy and his prisoner glaring at one another.

Nick gave Chick a few further instructions, and then quickly left the house.

"Southeast corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-eighth Street, Danny," said Nick, as he leaped into the automobile. "And pull up there."

In a few minutes they reached the designated corner, and Danny drew up to the curb and brought the machine to a stop. Then he sat in his usual manner with his hands on the wheel, and looking straight ahead into space, but ready for action at a breath.

Nick did not stir. He sat back in the car in a nonchalant manner, appearing to the passers-by like a benevolent old gentleman patiently waiting for some relative or friend to join him. He seemed to be utterly unconcerned in the affairs of others, but there was not a female figure within the range of his vision that was not shrewdly scanned by the detective, both in front and behind him, for now and then he would casually turn around in the car and glance at the stream of pedestrians on the avenue and turn quickly back, his eyes fixed straight ahead of him again.

He had waited about ten minutes when, out of the corner of his eye, he saw a woman come rapidly around the corner of Fifth Avenue. She did not pause, but made at once for the waiting automobile. She was heavily veiled, but the detective penetrated it in a moment and smiled quietly behind his false beard.

The woman stepped up to the tonneau of the car, and, leaning over toward Nick, whom she scanned closely, said, in almost a whisper:

"I am Miss Martin."

Nick turned quickly, and bowed courteously to the woman. Then he swung open the door of the tonneau, and said quietly:

"Will you step into the car, Miss Martin? We have some distance to go."

The woman sprang lightly into the car, without hesitation.

"Home," said Nick sharply, and Danny threw in the clutch, and the car swung around the corner and sped down the avenue.

"Keep within the limit, Danny," said Nick. "We do not want to attract any attention."

And much against his will Danny fell into the line of vehicles going south. Now and then, however, he would take advantage of an opening in the line ahead, and, swinging out of the line would dart into a place two or three cars in advance. In this way he beat out the speed limit by little spurts.

In the meantime neither Nick nor the woman had spoken a word, and as the car finally drew up in front of Nick's house, and he leaped from the car and held out his hand to assist the woman to alight, she did not offer any objection.

As usual, the front door was swung open, as if by invisible hands, and Joseph stood inside, a monument of silent patience. In another moment the detective and the woman were inside, and the door closed softly behind them.

Nick stood aside and threw open the door of the reception room.

"Will you please step in?" he said.

"I do not know you, sir, but I have placed implicit faith in my instructions. I am in your hands."

"Quite true," said Nick to himself, as he followed the woman into the room. As she did so, she uttered a sharp cry.

On a lounge at one side of the room lay Chick, while Patsy was sprawled out in a Turkish chair. Between them sat the prince, his hands handcuffed in front of him. He looked up as the woman entered, with a cynical smile.

"So you, too, have fallen into the trap of the excellent detective?" he said, as he recognized her.

The woman's face became white with fear, and she started for the door. But Nick barred the way.

"Pray be seated, madam," he said quietly.

"I demand that you let me leave this house!" cried the woman wildly. "I shall call upon the law to punish this outrage, if there is such a thing as law in this country!"

"Be seated, and be calm, madam," said Nick, with a slight smile. "I assure you that there is such a thing to be called upon in case of need. In fact, I believe the law has already arrived."

As Nick spoke, the front-door bell rang, and in a moment more the reception-room door was thrown open, and the inspector, out of breath with the haste he had made, rushed into the room.

"What's doing, Nick?" he cried, and then stopped short as he saw the other occupants of the room.

"Nothing, inspector," replied the detective. "It is done. There are your prisoners."

The inspector looked from one to the other in surprise.

"My prisoners?" he asked.

"Yes; permit me to introduce to you Prince Thamen and the Princess Tanza."

"I demand," said the prince quickly, and with some asperity, "proper consideration for our rank!"

"You shall receive all the consideration that is due to a murderer," answered the detective, and then he turned to the inspector, and said:

"Take them away. I charge that man with the murder of Franz Dannenhauer, whose body I picked up in the Sound. The woman is an accessory!"

With a gasping cry Princess Tanza sank into a chair. The prince did not change countenance.

"It will be a favor to me," continued the detective, "if you will hasten the preliminary hearing, inspector, as I am anxious to get away, and this unfortunate business has already caused me an annoying delay. Chick, please send word to Mrs. Dannenhauer, at the Cordelia, that vengeance has fallen on the slayer of Franz Dannenhauer. Inspector, my automobile is at your disposal."

THE END.

"Back from the Dead; or, The Disappearance of Princess Zora," which is the title of the story that will be found in the next issue of this weekly, No. 56, out October 4th, tells more of the problems that Nick Carter has to solve in connection with these strange people. Their crimes lead the detective and Chick on an ocean chase, which brings them to the strange country of "the little brown men." It is a story of absorbing interest and full of incidents that will grip your attention.

A PAPER GOLD MINE.

Or, Sheridan Keene After Money-order Book 2409.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WARM CHASE.

There was nothing in the conduct of Baker, when he entered Riley's saloon that would have rendered him liable to suspicion.

He merely flashed a casual glance over the several men gathered at the bar, and, with scarce any notice whatever of Sheridan Keene, he at once took a chair at one of the side tables and ordered a drink.

Keene waited fully five minutes before Baker began to show signs of impatience at not seeing the man he expected. Then the detective left his chair, and, securing another sandwich from the bar, turned to take a seat at the table back of Baker, and in the chair nearest him.

Baker did not give him the slightest notice, however, until Keene, turning slightly in his chair, abruptly addressed him.

"Easy, pal!" he said softly, half over his shoulder. "Don't you give yourself away. I have a word for your ear."

Though startled by the occurrence, its significance was instantly appreciated; and scarce a muscle of Baker's dark countenance changed. He turned a little in his chair, however, and glanced at the grim face of the party who had addressed him, then demanded doubtfully, under his huge mustache:

"Are you talking to me?"

"That's what, sir!"

"I guess you've made a mistake, young fellow," said Baker, not fancying the appearance of the stranger.

"It's not mine, then; but another man's."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I was run in for being drunk, last night, down in Salem," Keene softly rejoined, "and the fellow in the next cell to mine put me up to this."

"In the next cell to yours?"

"That's why I came up here this morning," nodded Keene, with an air of grim earnestness. "He said his name was Malloy, and he asked me what I was in for. When I told him it was only a case of drunk, he slipped me the stuff for to pay my fine with, in case I'd do him a turn for the service."

"What kind of a yarn are you springing on me?" demanded Baker, now turning about in his chair and facing the detective. "Do I look like a man who would have any interest in such a story?"

Keene artfully hesitated for a moment, as if this repulse had led him to fear that he might have mistaken his man.

"Mebbe I'm wrong," he growled shortly. "But I'd swear you was the party he wanted me to look for."

"What did he tell you?" inquired Baker, whose secret interest was fully as great as can be imagined.

"He told me he'd been arrested, though he didn't say for what," replied Keene, looking doubtfully up at his hearer from under his knitted brows. "But he said he was going to meet a man here to-day, and he wanted me to come up here and let him know what had happened to him."

"Did he say when he was arrested?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"He was pulled in the Salem post office Tuesday afternoon."

"At what time?"

"Somewhere around three o'clock, he said," replied Keene. "He told me he went there to get a letter, and that some Boston detective nailed him at the window where they give them out. He didn't tell me what he was pulled in for."

"What else did he tell you?"

"Nothing else at all," growled Keene. "He wanted me to be here just at noon to-day, and if a man, such as he described, came in here, I was to tell him just what I've told you. That was all he wanted, he said."

"Did he tell you the name of the man he wanted you to meet?"

Keene grimly shook his head.

"No, he didn't give me any names."

"What is your name?" demanded Baker.

"Joe Black."

"Do you live in Lynn?"